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V. S. Naipaul and the 1946 Trinidad General Election

Aaron Eastley

Precisely because history as the verbal representation by man of his own past is by its very nature so full of hazard, so replete indeed with the verisimilitude of sharply differentiated choices, . . . it never ceases to excite. The historical discourse is the world's oldest thriller.

—Ranjit Guha ("Prose" 55)

On 1 July 1946 the first election featuring universal adult suffrage was held in Trinidad. As reported in the island's leading newspaper of the day, the *Trinidad Guardian*, the "privilege of a lowered franchise" expanded the electorate nearly tenfold, from approximately 30,000 to 259,000 eligible voters ("Momentous"). This was a precipitous change, especially in a colony where voting even on a limited scale had only been instituted a couple of decades before (1925), in an era when lingering doubts about the qualifications of nonwhites and women had motivated the institution of property, literacy, and age requirements that disenfranchised all but about 6 percent of the population (Catón 628, Malik 69–70, 73, 75).¹ In 1946 these restrictions were lifted all at once.

This election becomes a historical touchstone in the early fiction and journalism of Trinidad-born author V. S. Naipaul. Beginning in his first novel, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), Naipaul focuses considerable attention on it, a focus that returns in a key section of his first work of journalistic or travel writing, *The Middle Passage* (1962).² As readers of *The Mystic Masseur* may recall, it is the 1946 election in which Naipaul's enterprising protagonist, Ganesh Ramsumair, transforms himself from a Hindu faith

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healer into a politician, initiating a personal metamorphosis that culminates in his becoming G. Ramsay Muir, M. B. E., a West Indian envoy operating in England and a shameless British mimic man (220). "Nineteen forty-six" is heralded in the final paragraph of the novel's opening chapter as "the turning point of Ganesh's career" (18), and the election and its aftermath constitute the major focus of the book's final three chapters. Even more notably, in a brief but pivotal (and now famous) section of *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul invokes the 1946 election to showcase his vision of the "picaroon" individualism of late colonial-era Trinidadians—the vision of his compatriots as opportunistic survivors in a social environment "where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness" (72). The journalistic analysis of *The Middle Passage* suggests the authenticity of a Ganesh-type character, while in the fictitious Ganesh the Trinidadian picaroon finds a most personable and credible incarnation. This is an important recognition, for the notion that Naipaul's journalistic works represent a decisive break from previous fictional work is something of a commonplace in Naipaul studies—one contributed to even by such a careful critic as Rob Nixon, who contrasts the "fierceness of *The Middle Passage*" with the "bounteous comedy of the early fiction" (12).

The relationship between these texts is not just a literary curiosity, nor are the events of 1946 in Trinidad merely the minutiae of West Indian history. For precisely because Naipaul introduces coherent interpretive paradigms from the authoritative subject position of a societal insider, and because most of his readers are not in a position to bring any significant degree of parallel local knowledge to bear on his representations of places like the West Indies, his perspectives have attained a level of influence seldom achieved by modern literary discourse. What began at the inception of his career with representations of Trinidad has multiplied in a sweeping array of articles and book-length studies where Naipaul articulates the defining characteristics—as he sees them—of literally dozens of other societies, mostly in the so-called Third World. Factor into this equation that Naipaul's predominantly hostile assertions are delivered in crisp, unsparing terms, and it is little wonder that he has emerged as a polarizing figure.

Those who are inclined to interpret Naipaul's acerbity as a sign of integrity hail him as a rare and courageous truth-sayer,³ apparently accepting his assurances that in his journalism "*nothing* [is] falsified" ("Dark Visions" 71) and that in his work as a whole an admittedly "brutal sort of analysis" is deployed out of "concern" rather than "contempt" ("V. S.

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Naipaul: A *Transition* Interview” 59; “A Conversation with V. S. Naipaul” 20). Others, however, accuse Naipaul of inveterate treachery—of being a sort of Uncle Tom interpreter whose every word must be questioned. No less a figure than Edward Said, for instance, opines that “the most attractive and immoral move . . . has been Naipaul’s, who has allowed himself quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution” (“Intellectuals” 53).⁴ Still others qualify their appraisals of Naipaul with reflections on the complexity of his personal origins, the cogency of many of his general perspectives, and the inconsistency of his tone.⁵ Matching the vehemence and prodigious output of the author himself, the debate surrounding Naipaul has been intense and multifaceted, and its prolonged fervor highlights the need for additional studies that carefully ground their analysis in historical particularities.

This is where an event like the 1946 Trinidad general election becomes of extraordinary interest: as an indicator, however partial or narrowly focused, of how Naipaul’s representations—both fictional and journalistic—compare with lived experience insofar as it can be reconstructed from formal histories and, more especially, from historically contemporaneous sources such as newspaper articles, interviews, diaries, and government documents. Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was 14 years old and living in the Trinidadian capital of Port-of-Spain during the election year of 1946. At this socially aware but impressionable age he witnessed the election and its aftermath in person and also through the press, as his father, Seepersad Naipaul, had worked on and off as a reporter for the *Trinidad Guardian* since before V. S. was born (White 27–29). His vantage point was in many ways ideal, but his views were obviously individual. And the same could be said of virtually all the extant primary texts touching on the election. The *Trinidad Guardian*, for instance, emerges as by far the most copious source of information, but as a news organ founded in 1917 specifically to cater to the island’s British elite, this paper is itself a highly situated source (Samaroo, “Vanguard” 3). As Ranajit Guha convincingly demonstrates in “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” even ostensibly uncalculating primary documents or historical narratives “are not the record of observations uncontaminated by bias, judgement and opinion” (59) but are in fact “packed with comment” (65). Still, as Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt put it, “there is something—the ‘real’—outside of the historical narrative” (50), and we may productively seize “at least upon those traces” of the real that seem “close to actual

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experience" (30). The challenge, then, becomes constructing a strategically authoritative version of events like the 1946 election from a limited pool of more or less highly situated primary documents. In attempting to do so, one discovers that the terrain is shifty but not impassable. Fundamentally, there is need not only for theoretical subtlety but also for disciplinary synthesis, for in historicist research in the field of Naipaul studies it quickly becomes apparent that although the disciplines of West Indian history and West Indian literary analysis are both well developed, these disciplines have often operated in relative ignorance of each other.

The aim of this study, then, is to merge textual analysis and its attendant vital political concerns with close historical scrutiny. What comes to light through this analysis is a pattern of insightful but ultimately unreliable narration by V. S. Naipaul. As both representer (in writing) and representative (in person) of Trinidad, Naipaul opportunistically plays the picaro himself: acting in the now-familiar but ever-problematic role of the "native informant" (Spivak, *Critique* 6, 9), he allows his fear of subaltern backwardness to turn much of his characterization into noxious caricature. Writing in a matter-of-fact tone that evinces reliability, Naipaul metes out both insightful (but strictly false) generalizations in the guise of historical facts and strictly accurate (but simplistic and misleading) representations of lived experience. His journalism thus takes on the qualities of fiction; and his fiction, often reading like news or historical commentary, is marred by both the exaggeration and limitations of an anxious orientalism. Across the gamut of his early work the slippage is uneven but persistent. Again and again the legitimacy of Trinidad vis-à-vis England and America is diminished—often subtly, occasionally grandly and grotesquely—and the only apparent survivor is the representer himself, who observes all things from an urbane, cosmopolitan, Oxford-educated distance.

The case against Naipaul may be said to begin where his explicit analysis of the 1946 election ends: in *The Middle Passage*. This curiously eclectic regional study, a text spangled not only with personal reminiscences and quotations from other travelers but also with calypso lyrics and frequent excerpts from the *Trinidad Guardian*, presents itself as a record of Naipaul's travels through the English-speaking West Indies and British Guyana in the early 1960s. It is sectioned out by country, and in the portion devoted to Trinidad the political analysis is especially pointed. Running under the telltale heading "Trinidad—The Picaroon" in the 2002 edition (69), Naipaul's sketch of the political climate of the day maintains

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that in order to understand “the squalor of politics that came to Trinidad in 1946,” one must know that the ordinary Trinidadian in 1946 “owed no loyalty to the island and scarcely any to his group” (72). Elaborating this startling assertion with a memorable metaphor, Naipaul compares his countrymen to “the sixteenth-century picaresque of Spanish literature, [who] survives and triumphs by his wits in a place where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness.” If there was unity in 1946, Naipaul would have his readers see, it was not rooted in sentimental solidarity or group loyalty but in a ruthlessly mercurial self-interest leading to the fleeting formation of ad hoc political alliances. Blatant pragmatism, it is suggested, was a legacy of colonial society, where “every man had to be for himself” and specifically had to “grasp whatever dignity and power he was allowed.” So conditioned were Trinidadians by this state of affairs, so the argument goes, that when “after no popular agitation” the franchise was granted in 1946, “the privilege took the population by surprise,” and in the uncertainty of the moment “old attitudes” prevailed.

This sketch is delivered in rapid-fire sentence segments that bespeak a wish not to belabor details but rather to convey as quickly as possible the essential contours of events less important in themselves than as indicators of a supposedly atomized Trinidadian society. Naipaul’s tone is that of an emotionally detached insider, an expert observer whose personal experience renders the society transparent, so that in this case the popular recourse to rank opportunism is “not unexpected” (72). Given this self-assured tone, it is curious to note that, taken at face value, certain particulars of Naipaul’s characterization are obviously false. Perhaps the best example is Naipaul’s claim that in the 1946 election “There were no parties, only individuals.” In fact, almost all of the major candidates in the election claimed some party affiliation, and the party concept was seen by many to be absolutely vital.

At stake in the election were nine seats on the Trinidadian Legislative Council, the primary governing body of the colony. However, since the constitution stipulated that nine other seats would be filled after the election by appointees of the governor, himself a colonially appointed officer wielding a decisive tie-breaking vote on the council, the British Colonial Office in London and its local emissaries in the Trinidadian capital of Port-of-Spain maintained effectual control of the government (Malik 74–76; “How the Constitution”; “Momentous”). Indeed, in view of these systematic strictures carefully maintained by the constitution,

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the granting of universal adult suffrage in 1946 was not merely the culmination of political unrest that went back a decade or more. Rather, it was a harbinger of the genuinely dramatic changes that brought political independence a decade or more later.⁶

In 1946 this underlying reality of ongoing colonial control was not lost on either the people of Trinidad or on the local press, yet it seems not to have discouraged potential candidates, nearly 50 of whom came forward to vie for the nine open posts ("This Is Your"). Leading the way in an effort to make the most of the political situation was an alliance of nine hopefuls who called themselves the United Front. Amalgamated from pre-existing labor organizations representing both black and East Indian working-class Trinidadians (Brereton 194–95), the United Front contended that owing to the balance of power created by the constitution only a team of elected representatives pledged to work together could have any real influence ("Women Tell"). The Front's agenda was outlined by their leader, leftist lawyer Jack Kelshall, who called for "responsible government, socialisation of the major industries, and mass education" ("Mr. J. B. Kelshall"). Kelshall was closely assisted in the pursuit of this agenda by United Front comrade Albert Gomes, former editor of the socialist-leaning literary magazine *The Beacon* and a labor union leader who already sat on the Legislative Council (Brereton 175; "Present Members"). Their ultimate goal, voiced in numerous campaign statements, was unrestricted self-government of the island.⁷ In the short term, however, Kelshall appropriated the "popular-front strategy that was in vogue among left-wing groups in Europe" in the hope that a powerful party coalition would possess sufficient political clout to force more meaningful constitutional reform (Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 73).

Although the concept ultimately failed to yield an electoral sweep, Kelshall's United Front and a competing nine-member coalition rather grandly named the British Empire Workers and Citizen's Home Rule Party did each capture three of the nine open seats, and two other seats were won by candidates of the Socialist Party of Trinidad and Tobago (Brereton 194–95). Strictly speaking, there was only one successful independent; parties played a major role. Indeed, the party politics of the election even find their way into Naipaul's novel *The Mystic Masseur*, whose publication predates *The Middle Passage* by half a decade. In the novel, Ganesh's Oxford-educated rival, Indarsingh, is presented as an affiliate of

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the “Party for Progress and Unity, the PPU”: a political entity that sounds very much like the United Front (200).

In light of these historical and literary facts, the notion that Naipaul simply misrepresented the situation out of ignorance is untenable. So when he quips that “there were no parties, only individuals” in *The Middle Passage*, it would seem that he is either blatantly prevaricating (perhaps counting on his readers not to know any better) or, more likely, writing metaphorically—suggesting that *in effect* there were only individuals. Such a likelihood is borne out by some of the particularities of the 1946 election, as the nomination system turned would-be nationalists like Kelshall and Gomes against their own countrymen—most notably a pair of charismatic opposition candidates who threatened the United Front’s intended electoral monopoly. As I will show, these opposition candidates played an important role in the unfolding sequence of events surrounding the election, and may also have inspired some of Naipaul’s most notable characters and ideas.

Ostensibly the most dangerous opposition figure was the founder of the British Empire Workers and Citizen’s Home Rule Party, famed oil-union agitator Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler. Butler had inspired a series of large-scale strikes in the mid-1930s (Brereton 172–73), and he claimed to have been chosen by God to lead the people (“Butler Claims”). Staunchly insisting on his full self-given title of “Chief Servant of the British Empire Workers and Citizen’s Home Rule Party,” Butler is now remembered by one prominent West Indian historian as merely a “sweaty demagogue” (Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 45), but his popular appeal in the 1940s and 50s was nevertheless tremendous, particularly among black working-class Trinidadians. That appeal was amplified in 1946 by his campaign promises to provide “free secondary education to all children, free books, free lunches, free milk and free uniforms—Butler uniforms—for all children attending school, bigger pay for workers, bigger old age pensions and the ‘dole’” (“Speaker Urges”). As an individual personality Butler was indeed a formidable political force, lending credence to Naipaul’s notion that in the election individuals were more important than parties.

Beyond Butler, moreover, the election was defined by a character much nearer to Naipaul’s own East Indian roots, a dashing thirty-something engineer turned politician named Ranjit Kumar. Kumar’s previous political activity had been limited to a short stint on the Port-of-Spain City Council, but in early April 1946 he announced that he would likely

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stand for election to the Legislative Council in North Port-of-Spain, Victoria, or the Eastern Counties ("Asked to Stand"). Unlike Butler, who made a serious tactical error in seeking to represent North Port-of-Spain, a district far removed geographically and socially from his power base in the oilfields of central and southwestern Trinidad, and the stronghold of his political archenemy, the already "Hon'ble" Gomes ("Butler Will"), Kumar wisely chose to run in the predominantly East Indian agricultural district of Victoria, where, despite his apparent lack of organizational backing as an independent, he captured more votes than any other single candidate, easily outpacing his United Front rival for the Victoria seat ("Kumar Gains").

This was precisely the result that the politically savvy Gomes had feared. Traveling the country in support of his United Front colleagues in the months preceding the election, he had relentlessly championed the doctrine of electoral unity, asserting that "unless a team gets into the Legislature, then the election is lost and the very force of adult suffrage is vitiated" ("Keep Out"). He specifically warned voters that if they could not unite in support of all nine United Front candidates, they could expect "the Colony for another five years to beat its chest in impotent rage because individual glamour boys seduced their way to the Legislature."

The handsome young Kumar was almost certainly the target of this barb, and his sensational victory makes him a fitting poster boy for the Naipaulian hypothesis that in the election there were only individuals and that picaroon ingenuity prevailed, more especially because his appeal seems to have been grounded not only in youthful good looks but in the conscious pursuit of an arguably opportunistic ethnic solidarity. Along these lines it is fascinating to uncover in a 1982 interview the recollection of Pundit Ragbir of El Dorado, Trinidad, that on the 1946 campaign trail Kumar posed with a bow and arrow in symbolic reenactment of the familiar Hindu drama of Ram and Seeta (La Guerre, ed. 190). Such a dramatic gesture would have been unmistakable: he was signaling his predominantly Hindu and largely illiterate would-be constituents that he could be relied on to promote their interests. The United Front's sensible political logic was ultimately no match for this—despite the fact that a mere week before the election the Front seemed to be enjoying considerable popularity even in Victoria.⁸

As it turned out, certain of the "old attitudes" Naipaul alludes to did seem to prevail. For as historian Selwyn Ryan maintains, speaking of the

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two decades preceding the election—from 1925, when the vote was introduced on a limited basis, to 1945—“the rural Indian in particular was not yet able, or in fact willing, to identify with abstract institutions like ‘council’ or ‘party,’” but “it was still very much a case of *apanjhat*—Indian for Indian” (*Pathways to Power* 5–6). Early evidence of the persistence of such feelings is scattered but portentous. To cite just one example, the *apanjhat* mantra was echoed in 1946 by the East Indians of a small village called Debe, where in the midst of widespread regional enthusiasm for the United Front a mostly Indian audience “declared they were ‘voting Indian,’ and broke up the [Front’s] meeting” (“United Front”). Running parallel to the *Guardian* column touting the United Front’s Victoria tour just one week before the election was a small announcement of seven “lectures” to be delivered during the final week by Pundit Basdeo Misir at Hindu temples throughout the island. The pundit’s topic?—“How to Vote” (“Indians”). The *Guardian* may not have seen this as something worthy of emphasis, either because it really was deemed insignificant or because editorial bias made its emphasis undesirable, but Indians were actively encouraged to “vote Indian,” and they were in any event probably predisposed to do so. If Ryan’s appraisal is to be credited, the Indian voter of the day still “thought mainly in terms of persons who could understand his language and his problems, and who would safeguard and promote his ethnic interests” (6).

This certainly seemed to have been the case on election day, as the incumbent Gomes convincingly defeated Butler in North Port-of-Spain, while Kelshall, in contrast, was even more convincingly defeated by East Indian challenger Timothy Roodal in St. Patrick. East Indians also won seats in Caroni and St. George (“Election Results”). In Victoria the predominantly East Indian voters of the district shied away from the plans of lawyer, experienced legislator, and demagogue alike, apparently seduced by the “glamour boy” with the bow and arrow. The complaint in *The Mystic Masseur* of Ganesh’s PPU rival Indarsingh, who may be seen as a stand-in for Gomes just as Ganesh may be seen as a stand-in for Kumar, becomes prescient: “Funny people in Trinidad, old boy. No respect for ideas, only personalities” (212).

In further defense of Naipaul’s claim that there were “only individuals,” not only did the hope of a unified electoral bloc fail to materialize in 1946, but the parties that contested the election subsequently broke up, raising the possibility that they weren’t quite real parties to begin with. In

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fact, much of what Naipaul says of the PPU in *The Mystic Masseur* could be said of the United Front as well. The PPU is carefully described as “an organization hastily slung together two months before the elections” (200), and shortly thereafter it dies. When the credulous Indarsingh looks to the PPU after the election to make good on its promise to cover his deposit (an official entry fee required of all candidates), he finds that the party has “just disappeared” (204). Similarly, the United Front coalition was also assembled only months before the election, and in effect ceased to exist almost immediately thereafter. Even its three elected members did not consistently vote as a body in Council matters as they had pledged to do (Brereton 196; Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 78–81). If the essential characteristic of a political party is that it endures over time while individual candidates come and go, the parties that existed nominally in Trinidad in 1946 hardly qualify. For although four of the five parties that contested the 1946 election also went on to sponsor candidates in 1950, and although Butler’s party remained a force until 1966 (Catón 637), none were ever really more than the political fronts of other organizations such as labor unions or religious fraternities, or the political fiefdoms of key individuals. And this was understood locally. Just a few months before the 1950 general election, for instance, Kumar cited the absence of a functional party system in a speech before the Legislative Council which caused no confusion whatsoever (“More Provision”). Thus Naipaul’s synopsis, in retrospect, may be seen to astutely highlight the importance in the 1946 election of individuals who could appeal to particular ethnic blocks—an insight in harmony with responsible histories, which convey that the election was indeed a “confusing” affair, “reflecting the undeveloped state of party politics in Trinidad, the importance of personality and leadership struggles and the divisions in the society” (Brereton 195).

There is a big difference, however, between saying that party politics in Trinidad were “undeveloped” and saying that “there were no parties.” For while Trinidadians and others acquainted with the country might appreciate the metaphoric insight of such a synopsis, outside readers almost certainly will not, and their view of the political legitimacy of late colonial-era Trinidadian society will be colored accordingly. Put plainly, the historian’s representation of “undeveloped” party politics implies a complex situation needing further exploration in order to be understood. Naipaul, in contrast, presents a simplified reality—one that just happens to mesh with orientalist assumptions of Third World “backwardness”

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(Said, *Orientalism* 205) and to darken the outline of his ever-developing "picaresque" panorama.

The rhetorical dynamic at work here is all the more reprehensible because it is not "ignorance, shared and unstated" that is at play, as in most misleading representations of subaltern experience originating with Western first-world writers (Chakrabarty 28). Naipaul is not ignorant, either historically or rhetorically. On the one hand, his familiarity with 1940s Trinidad is intimate. On the other hand, having lived for over a decade in England before writing *The Middle Passage*, he can hardly have failed to recognize how his words would likely be misread by a British or American public. Yet he seems willing to allow and even to facilitate such misreading, especially when it lends credence to the pet metaphors of his fundamentally interpretive prose. It is not ignorance but orientalism that structures the rhetorical relationship between Naipaul and many of his readers.

In addition to the ironic portrayal of a putative lack of sophistication in Trinidad's political structure and social organization in 1946, *The Middle Passage* makes claims that are rather more personal, reflecting poorly in a much more direct way on the people of Trinidad. Naipaul asserts, for example, that universal suffrage was declared in Trinidad "after no popular agitation" (72). This is strictly true. No suffragist riots, rallies, or protests as such occurred in Trinidad in the years immediately preceding 1946. On the contrary, Trinidad as a country can only be called a loyal supporter of Britain in World War II. However, it is fatuous for Naipaul to imply that Trinidadians were generally satisfied with their living conditions and had little real interest in political self-determination—a state of affairs that would account for their "surprise," as he characterizes it (72), when the vote was granted. In fact the vote came as a culmination of decades of popular struggle in various forms.

Most directly, the granting of the franchise in 1946 had its origins in the strikes led by Butler in 1937. In these strikes workers from both the oil and sugar industries of Trinidad acted in solidarity, having been brought to the limits of desperation by abysmal living conditions made finally intolerable by increasingly inadequate wages in the face of rising inflation—privations suffered even as the major corporations declared double-digit dividends for their shareholders.⁹ Uniting in protests that began peacefully but ended in violence, Trinidadian labor agitators succeeded where other colonials had failed in gaining the attention of the British Parliament. As

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the official record of the debates that ensued in the House of Commons in 1938 reveals, the unrest in Trinidad became a point of discussion partly because Trinidad's oil industry made the country more important to the empire than most colonies, partly because of the charismatic quality of Butler's defiance, and partly because in Trinidad there was a dramatic "loss of life" (*Parliamentary Debates* 334–38, 766–858).

The protests led to a dozen civilian and two police deaths (Forster 107), most notably the brutal murder of black policeman Charlie King by Butler's supporters on 19 June 1937. On that day King, a much-hated man by all accounts, showed up in plain clothes at a Butler rally in the oilfield shantytown of Fyzabad, apparently intending to arrest Butler. Slightly differing accounts have been published concerning the killing that followed, but all agree on the cardinal facts that King was first stoned and then burned alive after Butler confronted him with a declaration that went something like:

Hello Charlie King! I hear you come to arrest me, with your gold teeth shining like a circus clown. Go and tell those colonial bastards that I, Butler, will turn the British Empire upside down if they don't give the workers their just due.¹⁰ (Johnson)

Reports of this vivid spectacle seem to have elevated English public and official interest in the strikes, prompting the formation of the Commission on the Trinidad and Tobago Disturbances, whose findings were formally published as the Forster Report. When this report was released in January 1938 it sparked a fierce debate in the British House of Commons, with numerous Labour MPs using Trinidad as a case in point to decry the moral bankruptcy of their country's colonial policies.¹¹ These MPs called particular attention to the truly "extraordinary" fact that the commissioners "could not find out anything about the profits of this or that industry, or whether the natives wanted to have the vote," leading to the direct assertion by MP Benn that "the right and the approved method of defending the interests of these people is to give them the chance to defend their own interests by giving them the vote" (*Parliamentary Debates* 841–45).

The clear impetus for these comments, Naipaul's retrospective dismissal notwithstanding, was the popular agitation of ordinary Trinidadians led by an extraordinary elocutionist in the person of Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler. Calling Butler "an inspired negro genius," MP Bevan asserts near

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the end of the debates that “had it not been for the speeches and agitation of Uriah Butler . . . we should be ignorant in regard to the miseries of these people” (*Parliamentary Debates* 849). And from the outset, MP Maxton had maintained that “This particular Debate would not have taken place if there had not been an agitator called Uriah Butler” (816). It is ironic that Naipaul would specifically elect to use the word “agitation” in his denial, when Butler was so often identified as an agitator of the first order. The very governor of Trinidad at the time of the strikes, Sir Murchison Fletcher, recognized and admired Butler’s unique ability to rouse the populace, avowing that “Butler is an agitator . . . a person who stirs things up. I have tried to stir things up; and Butler has done it so much more effectively than I have been able to do” (qtd. in Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 57).

It was precisely this debate, driven home by the findings of a second commission under the oversight of Lord Moyne in 1939—in this case specifically charged with looking into the issue of the franchise in the West Indies as a whole—that led to the appointment of a Franchise Committee in Trinidad in 1941 and a recommendation in 1944 that the vote be given to all adults (Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 65; Samaroo, “Politics” 90). In due course a 1945 Order in Council made the proposed changes to the Trinidadian constitution official, and as soon as the war was well over the first election with universal suffrage was announced for 1 July 1946 (Brereton 193–94). Simply put, the timetable was a bit drawn out, but the vote in 1946 came not as a gift dropped inexplicably from clear colonial skies but as a direct result of a political domino effect set off by the popular agitation of 1937.

It might be argued, to be sure, that this agitation was not specifically for the vote, and that it was Labour MPs in London, rather than the people of Trinidad, who seem to have most expressly petitioned for the change. The Forster Report, in fact, is dismissive of the claim made by some Trinidadians that “inadequate representation” was a significant underlying cause of the 1937 “disturbances,” instead citing “the working and living conditions of the labouring people” (Forster 79). But this assertion, virtually unassailable at one level (who can doubt that their daily working and living conditions were of paramount importance to the Trinidadian strikers?), betrays a logical fallacy of colonialist mentality similar to that detected by Ranajit Guha in the official British renderings of peasant uprisings in India. As Guha argues in “The Prose of Counter-

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Insurgency," the various discourses of recorded British imperial history in India tend to agree in their erroneous presumption that peasant insurrections are "purely spontaneous and unpremeditated affairs" (45). Revolts in places like India are seen to "break out like thunder storms, heave like earthquakes, spread like epidemics"—all metaphoric interpretations that connote "a very low state of civilization" (46).

By comparison, the Forster Report is progressive in its recognition of material motivations. But in suggesting that the underlying economic causes were functionally separate in the minds of the strikers from the larger issue of inadequate representation, the report still implies a form of action more emotional than strategic: action merely as reaction "sparked" by the rhetoric of a fiery Butler. Yet as in Guha's reading of India, there was far too much at stake, and far too well-ingrained a pattern or experience of subaltern subjugation, for the "rural masses" to take decisive (and especially violent) action in anything less than a "motivated and conscious undertaking" ("Prose of Counter-Insurgency" 45–46). Trinidadians had a great deal to lose in the killing of Charlie King, for example, but they were motivated to action by his attempt to arrest and thereby silence Butler, a man who had courageously spoken out in the cause of their material interests against employers intent on preserving their advantage under a system in which they were under no legal obligation to allow their workers to organize and negotiate for better conditions. Trinidadian workers were not so naive as to fail to discern that their suffering was a direct product of their voiceless status, and that having locally elected leaders could be useful either in dictating improved conditions directly or in pressuring officials in industry and government to allow the formation of unions that could effectively lobby for such changes.

Furthermore, if there was ambiguity about whether ordinary Trinidadians specifically wanted the vote, it seems most likely to have arisen not because the people were ignorant of possible advantages but because the minority populations of the island were uncertain about what local democracy would look like. East Indians in particular feared that universal suffrage could result in an Afro Trinidadian power grab under which Indian interests might suffer even more than they already did under the British colonial regime (Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 69). Along these lines it might be noted that the immediate impetus for Trinidadian East Indians to "Vote Indian" in 1946 would have been well known to a figure like Albert Gomes, who served as a key member of the European and

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Afro Trinidadian-dominated Franchise Committee that initially recommended that adult suffrage be extended only to those citizens who could understand spoken English (Ryan, *Pathways to Power* 7–8). This move was accurately viewed by East Indians as a blatant attempt to disenfranchise Hindi-speaking people, who made up a large segment of the Indo Trinidadian population. So intent were the non-Indians on pushing through this policy that it ultimately took an Order in Council from London, overriding both the governor and the committee, to eliminate the language requirement and pave the way for regional Indian victories in 1946 (Samaroo, “Politics” 90). This Order in Council itself came as a result of Indian activism, adding a final touch of irony to Naipaul’s proclamation that the vote was granted after “no popular agitation.”

Perhaps the surest conclusion that can be reached from this data is that the sociopolitical situation in Trinidad in the 1930s and 1940s was extremely complex. It is this complexity, as much as the particular denial of the existence of political parties or the neglect of events that might be seen as popular agitation, that Naipaul’s representation of the situation elides. In reading his neat synopsis one is led to conclude that Trinidad was simply politically immature in the sense that most of the colony’s people were ambivalent about nonlocal issues and did not believe that participation in a democratic process would yield material advantages in their daily lives. Again, in creating this impression Naipaul glosses over the complexities of a history he knew only too well—an offense that even the conservative Colonial Secretary serving in the late 1930s, the Rt. Hon. William George Arthur Ormsby-Gore, did not commit, insisting in defense of his handling of the 1937 uprising that “the position [in Trinidad] is intensely complicated, and the climate is the hottest in the West Indies” (*Parliamentary Debates* 824). Ormsby-Gore was clearly not talking about the weather but about a society that was intensely frustrated by conditions that reflected a lack of political power. This tension and complexity are utterly lost in the themed rhetoric of *The Middle Passage*. And as suggested in the early stages of this essay, in this regard the book is very much the stepchild of Naipaul’s first, overtly fictional foray into the 1946 election, *The Mystic Masseur*.

While *The Middle Passage* tends to be summarily dismissive of the complexities of Trinidadian lived experience, drawing all analysis of the 1946 election back to the metaphor of the picaroon, *The Mystic Masseur* seems intent on turning any and everything Trinidadian into a farce, with

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feckless picaroon shysters generating most of the laughs. The political parties that would later be dismissed out of hand in *The Middle Passage* are the butt of a grand joke in *The Mystic Masseur*. Beyond simply dismissing the PPU as a transitory organization, the novel belittles the genesis of party politics in Trinidad through a damning account of the formation and evolution of an East Indian political organization called the Hindu Association. The Hindu Association is born out of the rivalry between Ganesh and a fellow East Indian competitor in the spiritual healing business, Narayan. Narayan raises the political stakes of their rivalry by founding a local periodical called *The Hindu*. The tone of disdain toward this paper in the novel is unmistakable. It is "a ragged thing, . . . printed atrociously on the cheapest paper," which besides its central section—an editorial opinion column innocently titled "A Little Bird Tells Us," in which Narayan regularly blasts Ganesh—is filled primarily with "repeated urgings to 'Read The Hindu'" and quotations from scripture (151–52). Through this dubious medium Narayan reaches out to like-minded Indians (that is, enemies of Ganesh) and forms a "party": the Hindu Association (166).

The illegitimacy of the Hindu Association as a party is as clearly communicated as that of the newspaper. When Ganesh first hears of it he derisively tells his friend Beharry: "You and me know what sort of thing Indian associations is in this place. Narayan and those people just like little girls playing doll house" (166). Ganesh's opinion signifies little on its own, but his verdict is quickly backed up by the main narrative. "Ganesh's judgment was sound," readers are informed, for besides electing Narayan president at its first general meeting, the Hindu Association also elects "four Assistant-Presidents, two Vice-Presidents, four Assistant Vice-Presidents; many Treasurers; one Secretary-in-Chief, six Secretaries, twelve Assistant-Secretaries." Every interested individual is recognized with an official position, cementing the party's identity as a childish make-believe alliance of dignity-starved picaroons, temporarily united by their jealousy of Ganesh.

Yet just as Naipaul's disdain for the parties of 1946 proves factually strained, this ridiculous portrayal of the Hindu Association looks tendentious in light of the fact that many actual Indian associations had a long and distinguished history of influence in Trinidad. A short list of these would include the traditionally orthodox Sanatan Dharma Association, the Arya Samaj, the Kabir Panth, and the Seurerinis or Siva-Narayanis

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(a name Naipaul appropriated—a phenomenon of which there is more to come) (Niehoff 112–13). Each of these groups had its own religious tenets, but politically the Sanatan Dharma was dominant, especially after it united with another major Hindu organization to form the explicitly political Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (Singh 54). Such religiously oriented traditionalist groups were but part of an organizational scene that also featured progressive secular organizations like the Young East Indian Party, the Trinidad Labour Party, and various trade union groups (Samaroo, “Politics” 83). A number of these organizations dated back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; many more had their origins in the East Indian cultural renaissance that began in Trinidad around 1930 (Campbell 119).

While Naipaul’s novel does not mislead in giving the impression that these bodies reflected and exacerbated schisms in the larger East Indian community, it certainly diminishes their scope and the seriousness of the divisions they reflected and caused (Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 72). Narayan’s party throughout the novel becomes more and more a joke, significant only when the *Trinidad Sentinel* (Naipaul’s stand-in for the *Trinidad Guardian*) ignorantly supposes it represents East Indians as a group and begins to report on the party’s activities (166). This notoriety irks Ganesh, and in retaliation he conspires with three friends to found *The Dharma* (helpfully glossed for non-Hindi readers as “the faith”), an organization that informed readers cannot fail to connect with the real-life Sanatan Dharma Association. Ganesh is elected business manager, his friends Swami and Partap editor-in-chief and editor respectively, and Swami’s nephew subeditor—as in Narayan’s party, everybody involved is granted a title (179–80). Likewise, Ganesh and company use their own rag to launch a rival party, the Hindu League (186–89), which ultimately takes over the Hindu Association through a bit of political skullduggery and muscle (193–97). This action is reminiscent in its results of the real merger that formed the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, yet the formation of Naipaul’s fictional superparty occurs under the most questionable of circumstances. Once the dust settles, Ganesh is elected president of the new organization, and in the wake of Narayan’s forced retirement he enters the 1946 election running against Indarsingh, a former Narayan supporter and Oxford graduate who has switched his allegiance to the PPU. This picture of party politics, ludicrous at best, clearly underlies the claim soon to follow in *The Middle Passage* that there were “no parties, only individuals” in the 1946 election.

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It also paves the way for more hilarious machinations of the picaresque when the political neophyte Ganesh handily defeats Indarsingh, who makes the mistake of campaigning as if he were running for office in England or America. In the race between these two “enterprising individuals,” to borrow a phrase used to describe the 1946 candidates in *The Middle Passage* (72), each proceeds to distinguish himself as laughably inept in his own way. Ganesh’s ineptness comes of never even trying to approach the election as a serious political process. He fights “the cleanest election campaign in Trinidad history” because he has, in fact, “no platform” (*Mystic* 199). His experiences in the faith-healing business have taught him that getting ahead in Trinidad is best done by playing to the prejudices of the people. So instead of political rallies he simply holds a series of “prayer-meetings” in which he “quite casually” announces his candidacy in Hindi. This program, a caricature of the lecture series offered by Pundit Ragbir in real life, is inept by Euro American standards but locally effective. In contrast, Indarsingh’s politically progressive platform is delivered in “long, carefully thought-out” lectures that he later publishes as “*Colonialism: Four Essays*—about the Economics of Colonialism, Colonialism in Perspective, The Anatomy of Oppression, The Approach to Freedom” (200–01). But his reward for such intelligence and energetic idealism is that he utterly fails to connect with the people, who instead gravitate toward the familiarity of Ganesh’s picaresque buffoonery.

This is Kelshall and Gomes versus Kumar and Butler all over again, but reduced to farce. Indarsingh becomes known as the “Walking Dictionary,” and Ganesh’s wife wonders aloud why those pestered by his big words “don’t throw something big at his head” (201). Even his published lectures cannot compare in the minds of the people with Ganesh’s book on *Profitable Evacuation*—a text cleared for printing only because authorities too lazy to read it assume from the title that it relates to the war. It does not. But the book trumps Indarsingh’s highbrow anticolonial lectures because it is attractively “printed on thick paper, with a cover of brightest yellow decorated with a lotus” (165). The people of Trinidad in this novel are not impressed with real intellectual depth or politically progressive ideas but rather with appearances, with personalities, and with a paltry but cunningly pragmatic approach to life similar to their own. *The Middle Passage* looms on the horizon: Naipaul’s only figure for the modern Trinidadian is, quite simply, the picaresque.

The trouble, again, is that this metaphor drastically simplifies the

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actual situation in 1946. It wasn't that simple, and those elected by the people of Trinidad to the Legislative Council in 1946 bear little resemblance to Naipaul's harlequin band of failed mimic men. In his fictional narrative, by holding up equivalents of the newly elected members of the Legislative Council (MLCs) to ridicule, Naipaul moves from satirizing systems—criticizing Trinidad's party structure and social organizations—to satirizing individuals. This is perhaps most vividly seen in the farcical representation of a state dinner that takes place at Government House after the election. Naipaul here has a heyday with the well-worn trope of the lower classes trying to leapfrog into the circle of the elite. Ganesh's "first experience as an M.L.C.," the state dinner is "a mortifying one" (206) for the characters and the country they ostensibly represent. Throughout the scene the inferiority of the new members "speaks" for itself through their heavily inflected local dialect. Words are left out that British and American readers associate with grammatical completeness, and several *mans* and *you knous* are thrown in, making the speakers appear simpleminded or almost illiterate.

Most prominently mocked at first is the clothing of the new councillors, described as "a treat for the photographers" (207). Ganesh (again, perhaps, the character most similar to Kumar) opts to show up in a dhoti; a member from Port-of-Spain (Gomes's area) chooses a khaki suit and sun helmet (a British imperial touch); another wears jodhpurs (an Indian look again, but in this case a colonial one); another "still adhering for the moment to his pre-election principles" comes in a working man's shorts and open shirt; "the blackest M.L.C.," a man named Primrose, comes in a "three-piece suit trimmed out with yellow gloves and a monocle." "Everybody else, among the men, looked like penguins, sometimes even down to the black faces." Clearly racist in tenor, these descriptions betray a general embarrassment for such socially inept people.

Similarly articulated is the limited knowledge of British table manners in this group. Several of them, including Ganesh, attempt to cover their ignorance by rudely refusing various items, claiming religious scruples or palate preferences. Others furtively look to the waiters for hints. Unable to catch their attention, however, one complains: "Is why black people can't get on. You see how these waiters behaving? And they black like hell too, you know" (208). As befitting a gathering of picaroons, at this dinner it appears to be mostly a case of every man for himself, a point emphasized when the "blackest" MLC falls victim to "unoriginal disaster" when his

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monocle falls into his soup. This man's lack of social grace in particular is highlighted as he immediately calls this blunder to the attention of the Governor's lady who, possessing contrasting dignity, has politely looked away. Ironically, when the other MLCs, momentarily forgetting their own troubles, "looked on with sympathy," he turns on them and says "What all you staring at? All you ain't see nigger before?"

The dinner is a grand humiliation, revealing the new MLCs as failed mimic men. The only possible exception is an "elderly Christian Indian" who brings as his partner a four-year-old daughter and plies her with morsels of the food the others are too baffled to approach. Even his confidence is marred, however, by the spectacle he creates in bringing a child to a state dinner, and still more by his disclaimer that he could not bring his wife because he has never married (207–08). All this is clearly done for comic satirical effect—but the satire is one-sided: only the new politicians and their partners are mocked. In stark contrast, the Governor's lady "moved with assurance and determination among the members and their wives. The more disconcerting the man or woman, the more she was interested, the more she was charming" (207). It is as if Naipaul is saying to his British and American readership, "Despite any outward trappings of office, I know that if you could mix with and really come to know our politicians you would find them hilariously, and at times disgustingly, unrefined."

However, although *The Mystic Masseur* maligns the speech, dress, and social graces of the winning candidates of the 1946 election, in reality they were well educated (by any standard), highly articulate (always in English, and for the Indian candidates in Hindi and sometimes other South Asian languages as well), familiar with a wide variety of social graces (including British table manners), and sincere in their pursuit of serious political goals. In short, they were the equals in the political realm of V. S. Naipaul in the literary. This is especially true of the Ganesh doppelgänger, Ranjit Kumar, and Indarsingh's possible double, Albert Gomes.

Evidence of the general articulateness of the candidates abounds in the election guide printed as a supplement to the *Sunday Guardian* 26 May 1946, which included a wide selection of invited statements submitted by leading candidates. These statements universally address serious political issues in good prose. Postelection press coverage of debates in the Legislative Council also provides ample evidence that the elected members were quite fluent in standard British English. This is not to

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suggest, of course, that other dialects of English or other languages are in any way inferior, but simply to raise questions about Naipaul's portraying his MLCs speaking in a local dialect that he could rightly assume many of his readers would see as a marker of ignorance.

The intellectual credentials of the successful candidates were also nothing to scoff at. Gomes, along with such notable figures as Alfred Mendes, R. A. C. de Boissiere, and C. L. R. James, was a leading figure in the Trinidadian cultural renaissance of the early 1930s, a movement built around the magazine *The Beacon*, which Gomes founded and edited, in addition to editing in 1937 an anthology of Trinidadian creative work (Brereton 175–76). Kumar, the son of a wealthy Punjabi banker, took his BSc degree as an engineer at age 18 from the Imperial College of Science in South Kensington in 1930 (Kumar, *Thoughts and Memories* 2).

While Naipaul mocks his MLCs' dress and dining etiquette, the front-page election results coverage in the *Trinidad Guardian* on 2 July includes photos of all nine winners, all dressed impeccably: eight in Western suits and ties, one (Mr. Abidh) in a high-collared traditional Indian formal. Gomes in particular was a natty dresser: in what may be termed his trademark picture (reproduced literally dozens of times in the *Guardian* over the years) he sports a fancy tie, a conservative suit, and a distinguished-looking pipe. As for Naipaul's mockery of the MLCs' dining etiquette, no mention of any official state dinner at the governor's residence appears in the *Trinidad Guardian*, but the Sanatan Dharma Association did celebrate the victories of Kumar and the other East Indian winners with a formal banquet held in their honor near the end of July ("Sanatan Dharma"). This was a serious political gathering, and it featured no trouble of note with table manners or utensils. On that score Kumar in particular, in contrast to Ganesh, would have had no trouble whatsoever, no matter what was served. Following his formal education in England he had returned to India as an officer in training for the Indian Imperial Police, and as such was instructed in law, drill maneuvers, riding, polo, hockey, and above all dining etiquette. "Most important was dinner in the mess at night," he recalls in his autobiography: "strict English etiquette had to be observed as if we were dining at Buckingham Palace. The most important things as a British officer in India were the social graces" (*Thoughts and Memories* 8). Eventually, as mess secretary, Kumar himself was in charge of meals and "became expert at foods and wines," giving several banquets that were attended by, among other local dignitaries, the Governor of Punjab.

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To label these tastes and attainments as mimicry is to stretch the bounds of that concept into hyperbole. Naipaul might have fairly and perhaps productively satirized the political leaders' social distance from the majority of their constituents, but instead he represented them as crude versions of the most uneducated of those constituents. Again, this is not to suggest that sophistication is definable only by a Euro American standard. But in making his jokes Naipaul consistently portrays the leading non-European figures of Trinidadian society in ways that prompt non-Trinidadian readers to see these figures and their society as inferior.

This is all the more clear when one considers that there were in fact many examples of bad behavior among rank-and-file Trinidadians in the political melee leading up to the 1946 general elections—behavior that Naipaul might easily have appropriated for farcical representation in *The Mystic Masseur*. Most notable were several instances of heckling at political rallies. On 4 May 1946, for instance (approximately two months before the election), the *Trinidad Guardian* reported that Butler was unable to hold a meeting owing to interference from Kelshall supporters ("Butler Gets"), who on another occasion "made a straw and rice bag effigy of [Butler ally] Timothy Roodal and thrashed it" ("Mr. Roodal Whipped"). Butler was again heckled and booed for a half hour straight as he tried to speak on 12 June ("Butler Booed"), and candidate Vernon Wharton faced "incessant heckling" on 19 June ("Hecklers Busy"). The problem quickly became so widespread that the *Guardian* ran a special column on it on 22 June ("Hecklers Breaking up Election Meetings"), citing numerous examples of what appeared to be "organized groups in every constituency" using heckling "as a means of breaking up meetings." The candidates themselves, as one might imagine, were incensed—one even called the heckling "the sort of conduct that leads to Hitlerism." Unruliness apparently reached its apex about a week before the election, as reports came in on 23 June of hecklers throwing rotten eggs ("Hecklers Throw").

Such accounts may help to explain why a writer like Naipaul would disparage "the squalor of politics that came to Trinidad in 1946" (*Middle Passage* 72). Certainly there were many who questioned the policy of universal suffrage from the beginning. Trinidad estate owner Sir Norman Lamont, for instance, speaking in Glasgow in early February 1946, opined: "it is strange indeed that, in an age and generation which pay so much lip-service to education, the franchise alone should be free for all, however ignorant or misguided" ("Sir Norman"). "This is the offspring,"

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he concluded, "of that bastard conception of democracy which assumes a peculiar inspiration in the opinions of the uneducated." Though more strident than most, Sir Norman voices a sentiment that seems to have been prevalent among Trinidadian and foreign elites.¹² His arguments recall the extreme prejudice revealed in the majority recommendation of the Franchise Committee that only those Trinidadians with demonstrable English language literacy should be allowed to vote. Such prejudices continued to surface as the election approached, reflected for instance in a system of symbols devised to aid illiterates in voting. Figure 1 shows a sample ballot employing this system. Figure 2 is a cartoon that mocks it. Although the system focused on the illiterate voter, an assumption of general ineptness is implied.

It seems unlikely that Naipaul, well educated himself even at age 14 and eager to eventually prove his worth in a cosmopolitan literary arena (*Middle Passage* 41; "Prologue" 43–44; *Reading and Writing* 3), would have been untouched by such powerful structures of feeling, pervasive in his island community. Certainly they pervade *The Middle Passage*, where the returning V. S. Naipaul memorably concludes that "the history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told" because "history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29). These sentiments had mellowed somewhat by the mid-1990s, when Naipaul published *A Way in the World*, but he still maintains there that "the problem" with writing in the 1950s and 60s about "a place like Trinidad was that black people were simply not a subject" (96). He apparently saw quite clearly that when it came to local West Indian life, in that early postcolonial era "no one was interested in the subtleties."




Yet his initial response to this rhetorical no-win situation in *The Middle Passage* is to convey to his British and American audiences that he can be trusted *because* he is a traitor—because he has local knowledge but shuns local loyalties.¹³ Just before introducing his vision of the Trinidadian picaroon, he speaks of a "yearning" among West Indians "to be thought different and worthy" (64). This "is not a new thing," he explains, and progress can be made "only when writers cease to think about letting down their sides" (64–65). He specifically suggests that "many a writer" from the West Indies "has displayed a concern, visible perhaps only to the West Indian, to show how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness." Others have done this, it is suggested, by whitewashing their group for outside readers. This Naipaul implies he will not do—yet







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Polling Day _____ **of July, 1946.**

Space for Initials of P. O.

DO NOT FOLD BEYOND THIS LINE.

1	BABULAH, CONRAD D. 72, Chancery Lane, Engineer.	
2	OCEAN, FRANCIS 291, Hayes Street, Merchant.	
3	RONSON, EMMANUEL 475, Maril Street, Insurance Broker.	

- 1  **HAND**
- 2  **STAR**
- 3  **HEAD**
- 4  **HORSE SHOE**
- 5  **TREE**
- 6  **BELL**

BALLOT PAPER (above) for the general elections is designed to make it easy for the illiterate voter. Symbols are assigned for each candidate as shown at left and right.

Symbols Aid Illiterates To Vote

Voting by illiterate persons is made easy by instructions contained in a notice issued by Mr. T. F. Parrell, Supervisor of Elections.







- 7  **HEART**
- 8  **BALL**
- 9  **BUS**
- 10  **ARROW**
- 11  **DIAMOND**
- 12  **TURKEY**

Figure 1. "Symbols Aid Illiterates to Vote." *Trinidad Guardian* 21 April 1946: 2.

in the very act of boasting that he is above such things, Naipaul does for himself alone what he accuses others of doing more generally. He shows just how far removed he is from the "blackness" of his group. This is accomplished all the more effectively in *The Mystic Masseur*, by Naipaul's making light of the candidates rather than the electorate, inasmuch as the candidates were more particularly his equals—and thus his rivals.

To conclude, then, the fictional representations in *The Mystic Masseur*, much like the sweeping visions of *The Middle Passage*, convey a spurious simplicity and attendant impression of backwardness, suspiciously targeting Naipaul's erstwhile associates. Yet here again, now that we are supplied with a wider array of textual examples and historical analysis, we must circle back to the core issues raised by Naipaul's surprising assertion of the "picaroon" nature of Trinidadian society. Has Naipaul through his

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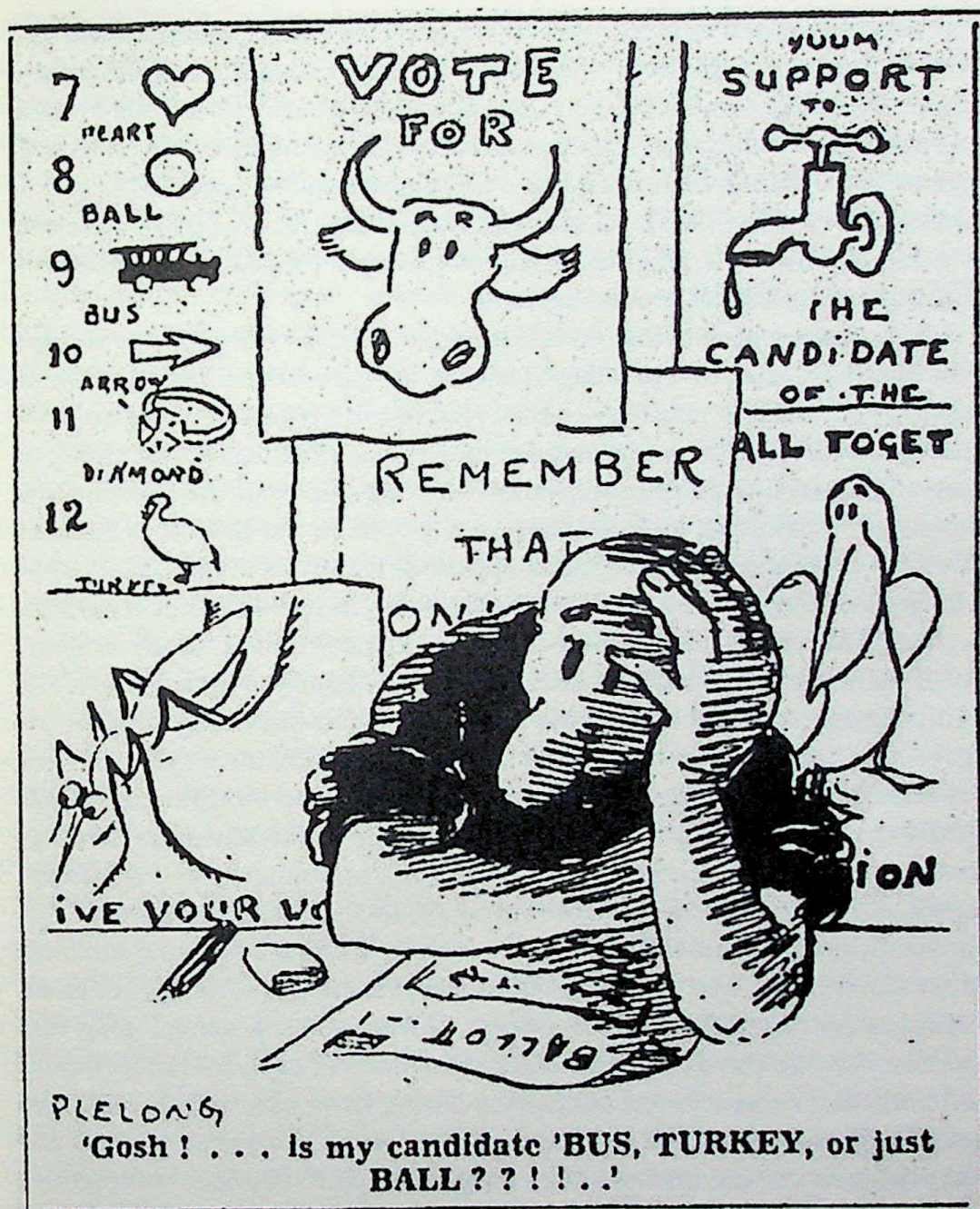


Figure 2. Cartoon by P. Lelong. *Trinidad Guardian* 24 April 1946: 4.

early fiction and journalistic work provided a skeleton key that unlocks for the uninitiated the underlying absurdity of mid-twentieth-century Trinidadian life? Does his satirical fiction, offensive as it might be to contemporary sensibilities, actually illuminate shadowy truths? And could

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it at least be argued that his journalism, with all its exaggeration and elision, is more insightful than misleading? Might Trinidadian politics on the whole, for instance, possibly be viewed as being much less serious in their inception than surviving historical records seem to suggest? Given that all sources are situated, could Naipaul's representations be regarded as just as authoritative or valid as those records? Ultimately, does Naipaul's situation as a societal insider trump the logic of multiple examples of apparently colonialist ideological renderings?

The danger here is that an insider's perspective will tempt us to suppose that by virtue of a privileged source the past has become knowable and grounded. Even naturally critical readers are predisposed to give extra credence to lived experience and the journalistic medium, and in doing so may, as Gayatri Spivak cautions, "allow the complicity of the investigating subject . . . to disguise itself as transparency" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 90). This is problematic because, as Raymond Williams puts it, the "always moving substance of the past" inevitably swirls in powerful undercurrents beneath the visibly placid waters of the "fixed, explicit, [and] known" (128). Although "perhaps the dead can be reduced to fixed forms" by living interpreters for their own purposes, "their surviving records are against it," and "the living will not be reduced," Williams wryly observes, "at least in the first person; living third persons may be different" (129). Williams's caution is apt; the postcolonial author, like any author, represents or "speaks for" a constituency much as a politician does—a concept signified by Marx's term *vertreten* (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 70). At the same time, the author is a literal representer through the medium of art (*darstellen*). This "double session of representations," as Spivak labels it, hinges on the distinction "between a proxy and a portrait." That distinction invokes the dual problematic discourses of authorial detachment and authorial omniscience: discourses arising in works, whether creative or critical, that imply either that a functional gap exists between texts and their subjects or that authors can "imagine"—and therefore represent—"the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other" (70–71, 75).

The internationalization of English literature in the wake of mid-twentieth-century colonial independence struggles in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere has created a literary environment in which readers often know comparatively little about the lived experiences behind fictional and journalistic representations. In this environment, where liter-

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ary texts themselves often serve as the first and perhaps only introduction to other places, cultures, and experiences, the power of the representer is clearly accentuated. This raises the question: what responsibilities devolve upon the postcolonial writer? Spivak's cautionary insights noted above are typically administered as correctives for first-world academics intent either on absolving their responsibility for the interventions made by their texts or on recklessly (and often selfishly) seeking to lend their voices to the silenced. Yet they apply as well, Spivak posits, to "native informants," locally knowledgeable "elites" whose insider status tempts readers to forget "that the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous" (79). In reality, to "confront" the subaltern "is not to represent (*vertreten*) them but to learn to represent (*darstellen*) ourselves" (84). Thus postcolonial artists ought never to be viewed as natural representatives of places or people in subjugated or formerly subjugated regions of the world, nor should their works be received as transparent images of subaltern lived experience. Receiving them that way perpetuates a fundamental tenet of orientalism, which Said perceives as a worldview "more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be)" (*Orientalism* 6). Academic or journalistic objectivity is an orientalist illusion. In reality, the works of postcolonial artists, again like those of any others, most directly represent the artists themselves.

This is true, I would argue, in a special way with regard to V. S. Naipaul, who has gone further than any other postcolonial author in seeking to escape the shadow of his own complicity with orientalism. The posed objectivity of a text like *The Middle Passage*, where he insists that one must be "icily detached" in order to tell the story of one's own country (29), seems too convenient a personal distancing for a writer whose first novel depicts a protagonist evolving as need demands, ultimately casting off his Trinidadian identity in favor of a British cosmopolitan façade. Trinidadians living and dead are reduced by Naipaul's thematic journalism in both *The Middle Passage* and *The Mystic Masseur*, and these texts are much more telling about their author than his island.

Nixon's suggestion that the "fierceness of *The Middle Passage*" contrasts markedly with the "bounteous comedy of the early fiction" (12) thus seems misleading. For while there are distinct tonal differences, to be sure, in their key "functions and indices" (Guha, "Prose of Counter-

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Insurgency" 54), the texts are twins: Naipaul's representation of the 1946 election in *The Middle Passage* is essentially a continuation of his original portrayal in *The Mystic Masseur*. In the novel the genesis of party politics in 1946 is belittled, the very notion of serious agitation in Trinidad is belied, and the lived complexities and larger nationalistic and imperial significance of island politics are severely elided. This becomes crucial in light of the impression of reliability conveyed first by the quasi-historical novel and later (to a much greater degree) by the journalistic travel book: the one-two punch of *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Middle Passage* implies that the grand jokes of the fictional narrative closely reflect actual experience. And in a readerly environment where historical credulity mingles easily with ideological prejudice and deference to perceived expertise, this makes all the difference.

In winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001, Naipaul was hailed by the Swedish Academy for "having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories" ("Nobel"). In view of my analysis, this statement is about half right. His early narratives are indeed perceptive, but his scrutiny is hardly incorruptible, and in revealing suppressed histories he seems to have suppressed a lot of history. Read as metaphor, Naipaul's first journalism and first fiction are insightful. Read as metonymy, they are misleading. Read as verisimilitude, they are utterly reprehensible.

Notes

1. Only literate, English-speaking men over 21 and women over 30 were allowed to vote in the 1925 election and the elections of the 1930s and early 1940s. Furthermore, since Legislative Council posts were unpaid, only people with independent incomes could afford to serve in them. For most Trinidadians government was a thing high up and far away, an in-house affair of the local elites (Catón 628).

2. This book is currently in print under two revised titles: *The Middle Passage: A Caribbean Journey* (Picador, 2001) and *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited* (Vintage, 2002). Unless otherwise noted, references to *The Middle Passage* in this article refer to the original 1962 hardback edition published by Deutsch, the layout of which was replicated in the 1981 Vintage edition found in most US libraries. This distinction is occasionally more than academic, as later editions include some minor textual alterations. Whether these are intended revisions or simply printing errors is unclear.

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3. Numerous examples could be cited. To capture the general tenor, consider Adrian Rowe-Evans beginning a 1971 interview by telling Naipaul that “the most overwhelming impression I get from your books is of a pursuit of honesty above all things” (“V. S. Naipaul: A *Transition* Interview” 56). A further example would be the Swedish Academy’s Nobel blurb in 2001, hailing Naipaul’s “perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny” (“Nobel”).

4. Though Jeffrey Meyers’s now well-known description of Naipaul as the “scourge of the Third World” is mitigated by its occurring in a passage questioning whether Naipaul has “mellowed” in a book like *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1991), there is little ambiguity in a host of statements from other critics. In addition to Said, the most notable of these is Abdul JanMohamed, in whose view Naipaul’s writing, beyond merely criticizing the Third World (something that might be done sympathetically and productively), “reeks of contempt and reveals only the operation of colonialist mentality” (87).

5. For instance, Feroza Jussawalla, recent collector of many of Naipaul’s most important interviews in *Conversations with V. S. Naipaul*, defends him, claiming that he “is not the man made out by his critics—a standoffish critic of the third world seeing all postcolonial countries as ‘areas of darkness’” (xv). In her estimation Naipaul is instead:

a man struggling with his own identity as well as his loyalty to his Indian family—at once a fierce, independent man struggling to break free of family, community, and identity and a little boy in need of solace, a desire to talk out and write out his psychological problems of family Indian and British, of nation and of the lack of belonging—a pull between home versus hybridity.

Somewhere between Jussawalla’s and Said’s is the view of Derek Walcott, whose 1992 Nobel Prize came almost a decade before Naipaul’s in 2001. Walcott is typically lumped in with Naipaul’s accusers, having coined the taunting moniker “V. S. Nightfall” in his 1981 poem “The Spoiler’s Return.” However, that poem, in singling out Naipaul for his cynicism, also defends him as an artist and empathizes with his critique of the Caribbean, especially its general lack of appreciation for art (“This Country” 74, “Art of Poetry” 111): “I see these islands and I feel to bawl, / ‘area of darkness’ with V. S. Nightfall.” Striking perhaps the most persuasive balance in recent scholarship, Bruce King offers a powerful defense of Naipaul’s literary politics in “Naipaul’s Critics and Post-colonialism,” a chapter appended to the second edition of his adroit study *V. S. Naipaul*—a defense all the more compelling for King’s admission in his introduction that Naipaul “has a history of ill-considered remarks which cannot be explained by politics and impatience” (3).

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6. Historical evidence suggests that Trinidadians of various walks of life had been actively petitioning for greater local representation since at least the turn of the century (Malik 69–72). This stirring eventually led Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies E. F. L. Wood to visit the West Indies as a one-man commission in 1921, “to examine the whole issue of representative government in the light of changed conditions in this part of the empire” (70). Around the same time, in 1922 a legislative reform committee led by Trinidadian labor leader A. A. Cipriani argued that “the people of the colony were well advanced in the fields of education and political consciousness” and were “mature enough to be given a direct share in the representative bodies” (71). It was in the wake of these diplomatic exchanges that the first, limited extension of the franchise was granted in 1925. With an eye to the future, constitutional changes in 1950 and 1956 allowed for more real representation, and full internal self-government was finally achieved in 1961 (Brereton 253).

7. Kelshall emphasized this point from the beginning. In his first recorded campaign speech on 9 April 1946 he spoke of the “dictatorial government” of Trinidad and clearly stated that the United Front “was created to rid the Colony of that form of government” (“Only Way”). Gomes was also a staunch advocate of self-government, asserting that a major aim of the United Front was to “precipitate constitutional crisis” with the goal of ending “rubber-stamp rule” (“Isolated Efforts”).

8. To wit, on Tuesday 25 June the *Trinidad Guardian* reported that the previous Sunday the leadership of the United Front (Gomes, Kelshall, and others) had toured Victoria, delivering their platform to “about 1,000 enthusiastic electors” in one community, and then to another “large waiting audience” at a prominent road junction (“United Front Tours Victoria”). This second session was reported to have been an unplanned gathering made up of people so “anxious to hear the Front’s programme” that they “demanded a meeting and listened attentively throughout.” On the same day the Front’s leaders also addressed a “packed hall” in San Fernando, the most prominent city in the southern part of the island.

9. Several oil and sugar companies operated in Trinidad in the 1930s, but the dominant oil producer was Apex Oil, which declared a dividend of 45 percent to its shareholders in 1937, and the leading sugar producer was Trinidad Leaseholds Limited, which paid out a 30 percent dividend to its shareholders in the same year (Ryan, *Race and Nationalism* 61–62).

10. In a 2005 interview, eyewitness Elbert Redvers Blades, born 1902, recounts Butler’s statement this way:

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Ah Charlie King, ah hear you come to arrest me, your gold teeth shining in the sunlight like a circus clown. Go and tell those bastards of yours if they do not give the workers their just due, I Uriah Butler will turn the British Empire upside down. (Fraser)

11. Labour MP W. Lunn initiates the discussion by suggesting "It is a rare thing for any event that takes place in any British Colony to get any sort of publicity in this country," but "the disturbances in Trinidad, the loss of life that resulted from them, the appointment of the Commission and their report, are an exception to the general rule" (*Parliamentary Debates* 778). Lunn points out the difficulty of getting so much as a copy of the report, or even of the minutes of the House debates from the week before, when the issue of Trinidad was first raised. Yet "this sort of thing has been going on in many parts of the West Indies for a long time," he insists, "for weeks and months." MP Riley expands on this perspective, calling attention to "the circumstances out of which these disturbances took place and the fact that successive Governments have known of these conditions for the last 40 years" (807). The overriding sentiment among Labour MPs, voiced in succession by Lunn, Riley, and especially MP Benn, is that the British government has failed its colonial subjects in the West Indies, neither protecting their interests in the House of Commons by insisting on good administration through the Colonial Office nor allowing them local political representation (844-45). With this in mind, Riley asks point-blank: "What are the Government going to do to give an increased measure of responsible democracy throughout the West Indian islands? What are they going to do to make the franchise easier for these people?" (807). Of Butler, MP Maxton concludes that he "performed a service not merely to this House of Commons . . . but he performed a great service to coloured workers in every part of the British Empire. . . . Three cheers for Butler!" (821-22). This enthusiasm, along with the inclination to address the underlying economic and social issues in the West Indies through an extension of the franchise, was shared by Labour MPs as a body. "I, like every other Member on this side," MP Gallacher sums up in closing the debate, "am for the people of Trinidad," and "everyone has the right to the franchise" (855).

12. Consider, for instance, a series of statements made in the months leading up to the election by foreign visitors and local dignitaries alike, all of whom seemed concerned that perhaps the common people were being endowed with a greater privilege and responsibility than they deserved. One of the most notable of these observers was A. J. Pelletier, a Canadian who had organized the first general election in the West Indies (in Jamaica in 1945) and was subsequently imported to arrange the Trinidadian event. Pelletier is headlined in the *Trinidad Guardian* urging voters to "justify the new trust" that had been

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placed in them ("Mr. Pelletier Says"). Similarly, Dr. S. M. Laurence, in an editorial piece published about a month before the election, speaks of the "high responsibility" of the vote, and suggests that "Trinidad is within a few paces of a political crossroads" ("Trinidad Has Arrived"). "The privilege of the vote is a sort of coronation of the dignity of the human person," another foreign visitor observed, and "Real men, I know, will weigh well before voting" ("Visitor Says"). Such statements were essentially hopeful but betray trepidation that the "privilege" of the franchise was perhaps a pearl being cast before swine.

13. As Rob Nixon has convincingly shown, Naipaul's self-fashioned ethos is exceptional. Through the medium of his journalism in particular, Naipaul has forged an image of himself as an "expert" observer, one "possessing a penetrating, analytic understanding of Third World societies" (4). This is indeed a "reputation of a different order" from that enjoyed even by most other postcolonial writers, whose representations are often perceived to be biased in favor of their native lands, while the contrarian Naipaul emerges "as a figure . . . untrammelled by ideologies and beholden to nobody" (10).

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Bedrock, Erosion, and Form:

Jorie Graham and Wittgenstein

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Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad.

—Thoreau (344)

On the floor of the empty carriage lay five or six kernels of oats which danced to the vibrations and formed the strangest patterns—I fell to pondering over it.

—Kierkegaard (169)

One of Marjorie Perloff's projects in *Wittgenstein's Ladder* is to delineate a "Wittgensteinian poetics" (181) by reading several contemporary poets directly influenced by Wittgenstein, among them Robert Creeley, Rosmarie Waldrop, and Ron Silliman. I try to continue this work here by reading Jorie Graham's poetry (though it may have been influenced by Wittgenstein only indirectly), not so much with a Wittgensteinian poetics in view as with the aim of advancing what Wittgenstein calls "that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'" between cases (*Philosophical Investigations* §122), an understanding less occupied with constructing a theoretical edifice than with illuminating points of contact between things that are already in front of us. I also try to follow the work of Thomas Gardner on Graham's poetry, but again with a difference: where Wittgenstein is usually left hovering, though no doubt significantly, in the background of Gardner's work (particularly in *Regions of Unlikeness*), I bring his writing to the foreground, especially *On Cer-*

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tainty. One reason for doing this is to make a case for the importance of thorough applications of Wittgenstein in literary studies, where references to his philosophy, even in the work of astute critics, are often cursory and misleading. Take, for example, Angus Fletcher's claim that Wittgenstein "see[s] nothing good in the Transcendental" (73), a claim that would lump Wittgenstein with the logical positivists from whose misreadings of the *Tractatus* he took such pains to distance himself. While Perloff and Gardner, along with James Guetti, Walter Jost, and others, have done much to bring Wittgenstein to literary studies, there is still more, I think, to be done. First, a few words on the supposed rift between Wittgenstein and Continental thought seem called for. Wittgenstein was, of course, first and foremost a Viennese, a Continental, and yet his philosophy is more regularly represented as "analytic" and therefore opposed to the writings of, say, Derrida. This has obscured their often similar conclusions, particularly concerning how language functions according to an inherent errancy that guarantees meaning via the ever-present prospect of its breakdown. Both Wittgenstein and Derrida propose this picture of language, though they do so in different ways—Derrida by decentered, playful discourse and Wittgenstein by associative remarks and condensed similes. Reading one without the other risks the calcification of interpretation against which both caution us—and against which Jorie Graham's poetry is constantly on guard.

From the first poem of her first book, Graham has taken up the question of how meaning is simultaneously generated and frustrated, secured and set adrift, by language. In "The Way Things Work" "things" would seem to include language itself, which functions "by admitting / or opening away" (*Dream* 3), by "solution" (both answer and mixture). Graham believes in several particular things—"ingots, levers and keys," cylinder locks and pulleys—and early in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein famously likens the function of words to "the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, nails and screws" (§11). Similarly in Graham's poem, things, including words, function by a variety of mechanisms, some of which fasten while others loosen: "The way things work / is that eventually / something catches." What things are doing when they aren't catching is the very condition by which they eventually do catch; the possibility of intelligibility (of grasping or catching the drift of something) is ensured by unintelligibility, evasion—a

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dynamic that Graham's work also investigates, laments, celebrates, and lets go (both liberates and allows).

Wittgenstein's last writings, published as *On Certainty*, are similarly occupied with the question of the way things work and how they can eventually catch and hold for us. Thus much of Graham's work is illuminated by certain passages in *On Certainty*, just as Graham can illuminate Wittgenstein. I will use the titles of four of Graham's volumes (*Erosion*, *Materialism*, *The Errancy*, and *Swarm*) as a loose organizing principle, as these titles seem to have been largely inspired by the philosophical dilemma of how meaning works.

§

Many of the remarks collected in *On Certainty* are either direct or indirect responses to G. E. Moore's refutations of skepticism in "A Defence of Common Sense" (1925) and "Proof of an External World" (1939). They make clear that even in the late 1940s and early 1950s Wittgenstein was still concerned with a central proposition from the *Tractatus*: "Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked" (6.51). Where Moore attempts to refute skepticism by proving the existence of an external world, Wittgenstein asserts that a proof cannot be given to refute a position that is "senseless." In doubting the existence of the world, the skeptic has already tacitly acknowledged a number of things that have to be in place for the language game of doubting to occur. That is, the skeptic, to endorse groundlessness, needs a ground from which to elucidate his position, namely the mastery of a technique of language, which we acquire from an early age and which is an integral component (even a determining factor) of the world whose existence the skeptic would doubt. Wittgenstein thus takes neither Moore's side nor the side of the skeptic (though his sympathy is with Moore) but instead asks if Moore himself has "got the right ground for his conviction" (*On Certainty* §91). That is, why should Moore attempt to prove empirically what the skeptic has already, albeit unknowingly, acknowledged, namely the existence of a world?

The question of grounds is raised throughout *On Certainty*, in relation, for example, to doubt (§122), to experience (§130), and to belief (§166). And one finds other geological metaphors—references to "matter-of-course foundations" (§167) and the "rock bottom" of convictions

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(§248)—and such things as a lack of sharp boundary lines (§52, §318, §454), gradual alterations (§63, §473), things merging into one another (§309), the need for footholds (§356), the threat of judgment toppling or going to pieces (§419, §420), and the need to be able to just take hold of something (§510) so as to avoid a plunge into chaos (§613). In the preface to *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes, “The best that I could write would never be more than philosophical remarks; my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on in any single direction against their natural inclination” (v). In other words, attempts to dictate, direct, or strenuously order his thought have a necessarily damming effect; to force a channel against the natural inclinations of a thought cripples it. The “very nature” of his investigations thus “compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction” (v). By such topological ranging, though, we do not entirely abandon the inclination to order and control so much as we secure it by refusing to cripple either ourselves or our thoughts in the name of stability. That in pursuing philosophical investigations boundary lines become unclear, things merge into one another, and footholds are less than wholly adequate—that we must proceed rather haphazardly—turns out to reflect not so much any shortcomings of the investigator or the equipment as the very nature of the work. Wittgenstein’s redirecting the problem of skepticism from the domain of empiricism to the field of language, then, gives rise to the question of how (and to what extent) meaning is guaranteed both through and despite the disintegrative forces of language; the grounds of our convictions are ultimately predicated on processes of erosion.

Jorie Graham’s critics often use geological and riverine metaphors to describe her poetry. Bonnie Costello sees in it, for example, an equation between “conditions of consciousness” and the “conditions of erosion in which we live and think” (15) and notes that often in the poems “an apparent narrowing into limits allows for a sense of expansion” (23), just as a river carving a narrow channel through rock forms the expanse of a canyon. Willard Spiegelman writes that Graham’s poems, like a river, “branch easily, luminously” (“Nineties” 234); her “syntactic volume and heavy verbal impasto sweep ever onward” (235), and by means of such “torrents of syntax,” she “everywhere scoops up large bucketfuls of physical-metaphysical overlappings” (236). For Susan McCabe, in Graham’s poetry “identity loses its banks” (188); she offers us “poems of subtraction—the radical removal of stable moorings.” And as Forrest

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Gander has it, Graham's volumes constitute "a kind of echo chamber of Western literary culture" (75), a canyon from whose walls voices boom and resound, their origins wayward and difficult to determine.

Throughout her poetry Graham wonders at the manifestations and breakdowns of what surrounds her, often leading her to break things down herself and, when this fails, to break herself down—to cease to function and to turn the critical eye inward. "Always / I am trying to feel / the erosion," she writes in the title poem of *Erosion* (56), a poem that begins by resisting something presumably better: "I would not want, I think, a higher intelligence, one / simultaneous, cut clean / of sequence." While there is some hesitation in this assertion ("I think"), it is precisely this hesitation, this ability to pause and think, that is being affirmed as preferable to a form of consciousness cut clean from it. "No," Graham continues, "it is our slowness I love, growing slower," our trying to feel "daily / the erosion / of the right word, what it shuts."

One would expect linguistic erosion, or the erosion of meaning and grounds, to result from wrong words, but the right word also erodes. Right or wrong, any word is subject to processes of erosion and sedimentation, errancy and stability, that enable it to reach a destination or to be destined at all. Erosion, then, far from posing a threat to all grounds, is in fact essential to them. Conceptual erosion does indeed threaten to undermine clarity and understanding, but at the same time it allows in part for their possibility. That matter and matters are capable of being broken down (or that they do break down) is what ensures their intelligibility, even if it prevents their being wholly understood, or understood wholly. At the entrance to Walden Pond there is a trail sign that reads, "Help fight erosion, please stay on path," and while such efforts to regulate human traffic in nature are, of course, useful, there are two mistaken assumptions embedded in the directive to "help fight erosion": first, that erosion is a wholly negative phenomenon, and second, that it can be fought and defeated. Erosion is less an insidious force, that is, than simply what happens; one can attempt to prevent it by directing everyone along the same path, but that traffic will itself do the work of erosion. Even placing the sign in the ground accomplishes some portion of the work it is intended to prevent.

One of Wittgenstein's primary concerns is semantic erosion, the wearing away or obscuring of a word's meaning from inept philosophical handling (often including his own) in the form of propositions that,

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like trail signs intended to prevent erosion, participate in the process they are intended to curtail. Again, the fault lies less with the philosopher than with the nature of working, as it were, on a fault. Wittgenstein writes, for example, of his early joint sessions with Russell, "We felt that language could always make new and impossible demands; and that this made all explanation futile" (*Culture and Value* 30). If the philosopher's plying erodes the banks of language, then, language itself proves capable of dismantling philosophical confidence. While the remark just quoted refers to Wittgenstein's early ventures in philosophy, in his last writings we see him still trying to accommodate himself as best he can to the new and impossible demands of language. "Where others go on ahead," he wrote in 1948, "I stay in one place" (66). This remark may imply a critique of his capacity to advance along with others, but it also suggests he knows something others do not, that it might be just as or more important to track processes of movement as it is to engage in them. Like Graham, Wittgenstein thus might say, "it is our slowness I love."

Graham's own concern with semantic erosion—with the fact that language constantly makes new and impossible demands despite persistent, partly successful attempts to regulate it—runs throughout her poetry, and it prompts her sometimes drastic stylistic (or tectonic) shifts. The new and impossible demands of language are both mirrored in and met by the new and difficult demands of her poetry. She wonders (and trembles) less at the fact that there is something rather than nothing than at the fact that the something that is is like this, works in this particular way, reveals itself thus, and changes in accordance with both known and unknown laws. That "something" might be now the myths we inherit (as in *The End of Beauty*), now our own memories of adolescence (as in *Region of Unlikeness*), now a tree with birds in it during a snowstorm (as in "The Dream of the Unified Field"). Graham is enthralled both by the fact of erosion itself and by the particular ways in which certain things erode or have eroded over the course of history: religion, poetic tradition, and Western philosophy, among others. That these have taken the particular courses they've taken, that they are entangled with one another in the ways that they are, is a matter of endless fascination (and sometimes terror). And she does not readily distinguish between the erosion of such things and actual geological erosion. For Graham as for later Heidegger, the destinies of human constructions are not necessarily governed by human beings;

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erosion largely takes care of itself and does not require (though it may involve) specific human agency.

Wittgenstein illustrates this conceptual erosion in *On Certainty*. "It might be imagined," he writes,

that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid. (§96)

The hardened propositions in this picture constitute what is given, what "is there—like our life" (§559). Moore's "proof" of an external world via his "knowing" that his hands are before him is for Wittgenstein thus nonsensical as a proof. The proposition "these are my hands" (where one is clearly referring to one's hands), along with thousands of other "hardened" propositions, forms the bedrock on which less-solidified language games such as proving and doubting can be played. To attempt to either prove or doubt these propositions is thus nonsensical; one cannot doubt the grounds that enable one to doubt. And yet this bedrock, like the bedrock of an actual river, is itself always changing, shifting, for the most part gradually but occasionally quite violently. Recognizing this keeps Wittgenstein's concept of "forms of life" from hardening into the sort of philosophical absolute he resisted.

The metaphor of the river and its bed posits (or deposits) the fact that language games operate on two different planes, one fluid and one hardened, but the difference between them is not always clear: "I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other" (§97). In our daily lives we make constant use of both hardened propositions, those we take for granted ("My name is Ludwig") and fluid propositions, which are much more susceptible to doubt and debate ("That was a good movie"). Obviously, we generally do not acknowledge this difference (as if we were pulling now from this supply, now from that) for the distinction between hardened and fluid is an oversimplification of a gradual alteration or process of erosion constantly occurring in language, and one might easily imagine cases where the first example given above is fluid in nature, the second hardened.

The poststructuralist dilemma of whether the world gives rise to lan-

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guage that describes it or language gives rise to the structure of the world it describes is not an issue for Wittgenstein. The shift from the former perspective to the latter marks a shift in the bedrock of our world-picture mythology (§95, §97). What we are now capable of doubting we had formerly been quite certain of: that language describes the world. "The same proposition," he writes, "may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing" (§98). Wittgenstein is attempting less to establish a truth about the relationship between language and the world than to show how such a truth is formed, altered, and dissolved over time. In other words, it is not so much a question of settling the matter one way or the other by way of argument and proof as of understanding both how things have shifted, eroded, and caught over time and our relationship to these processes (whether or not we had a hand in them, whether we act with a shift or against it, how we accommodate it, and so on). It is precisely these questions that Graham explores, a difficult business where one's footing is never entirely sure (as in Graham's free verse) and where language constantly makes new and impossible demands.

Part of Wittgenstein's argument in *On Certainty* is that Moore cannot prove he has two hands by holding up his hands and saying, "These are my hands," where the proposition would agree with the fact of his two hands being in front of him, and this would constitute a proof. But where the skeptic would rejoin something like "But you can't be *certain* of that," Wittgenstein redirects the whole dilemma: "Here we see that the idea of 'agreement with reality' does not have any clear application" (§215). It is not so much that propositions agree or disagree with reality (and that this can be proven one way or the other), nor that they themselves constitute reality, but rather that a network of propositions that we are taught as a foundation holds true for us, enabling debates concerning things like "agreement with reality."

In a review essay of several studies of *On Certainty*, John H. Whittaker characterizes the question of whether a proposition agrees with reality as part of "the difficult relation between experience and its incorporation into our conceptual grammar" (297). It is just this "difficult relation" that Graham explores in her poetry, which is thus often labeled as difficult—dense, unorthodox, hard to interpret. "It is very difficult," writes Wittgenstein, "to describe paths of thought where there are already many lines of

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thought laid down,—your own or other people's—and not to get into one of the grooves. It is difficult to deviate from an old line of thought *just a little*" (Zettel §349). In order to do so, one must think "even more crazily than philosophers do" (*Culture and Value* 75), and for Graham, poetry affords a space for such crazy thinking.

At stake in *Materialism*, Graham's fifth volume, writes Elisabeth Frost, "is the whole body of Western thought. The 'materialism' of her title refers not to American middle-class values . . . but to the physical world—to matter and life" (34). Interspersed throughout it are excerpts from that tradition that address the constitution of reality and how human actions and assertions correspond to that constitution. Among the works quoted are Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (the eighteen motions of reality), Plato's *Phaedo* (on the nature of the soul), Jonathan Edwards's *Doctrine of Original Sin* (on God's creation of every material instance from nothing), and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (subsets of the second proposition, "What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts"). These and other works are quoted not only to critique how certain worldviews endorse specific brands of materialism but also, I believe, to savor their strange meticulousness. Graham's complex appreciation for various manifestations of materialism is equivalent to her earlier position (or positions) on erosion.

Materialism begins and ends with poems that describe rivers. The opening poem, "Notes on the Reality of the Self," is one of five in the volume so titled, none of them featuring the self as customarily conceived. Are what the poems describe (rivers, bakeries, gateposts) offered as models for the self, or do they themselves actually constitute it? As in Stevens's "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," only "notes" are presented, from which one can hardly draw substantial conclusions.

That first poem begins, "Watching the river, each handful of it closing over the next, / brown and swollen" (3). "Watching" indicates a person, a human self (observing, taking notes), but the reality of the titular self seems more present in the "handfuls" of the river (not quite a personification, though not quite not one, either) closing over each other. In this the river resembles the poem, each line (or even foot) closing over the next (like Wittgenstein's investigations, where there is often a "lack of sharp boundary lines"). Consider the next lines:

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Oaklimbs,
 gnawed at by waterfilm, lifted, relifted, lapped-at all day in
 this dance of non-discovery. All things are
 possible. Last year's leaves, coming unstuck from shore,
 rippling suddenly again with the illusion,
 and carried, twirling, shiny again and fat,
 towards the quick throes of another tentative
 conclusion, bobbing, circling in little suction their stiff
 presence

on the surface compels. Nothing is virtual.

"Oaklimbs" is another near-personification, and the fact that the waterfilm is gnawing at the limbs turns the river, if not into a person, at least into something with teeth. Subject to the whims of the river, the oaklimbs become like the river itself: constantly in motion. Like all the poems titled "Notes on the Reality of the Self," this one is itself a "dance of non-discovery," where the assertion "All things are" is, like a riverbank, undercut, by the motion of enjambment: "All things are / possible," and hence not manifestly present. One handful of material closes over the next as "possible" supplants "are" and syntax swirls back on itself, as at the end of the passage above (where postponing the verb "compels" creates a kind of eddy). In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein describes the banks of *his* river as consisting "partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited" (§99); some propositions are hardened, some are susceptible to sudden and even violent alteration, and some are like the pebbly, sandy stages in between. Propositions on the nature of reality from the works of Bacon, Plato, Edwards, and Wittgenstein himself, among others, might occupy any point or points along this spectrum; having once formed part of the bedrock, they may subsequently, through a complex process, be set adrift, rendered indeterminate. Graham's poetry is part of that process but also subject to it.

The river, or poem, like its leaves "coming unstuck from shore," moves on "towards the quick throes of another tentative / conclusion," but "conclusion" complicates "tentative," and "towards" brings up the question of whether these "throes" are ever reached at all. It is as if an uttered word or proposition manifested itself as a leaf on the surface of a river of language, a leaf that could get stuck to the bank for a while and

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so appear to be a permanent fixture, but might become dislodged, and in its "stiff presence on the surface" bob and circle in an assertion of both its likeness and unlikeness to the river that carries it along:

The long brown throat of it sucking up from some faraway melt,
Expression pouring forth, all content no meaning.
The force of it and the thingness of it identical.
Spit forth, licked up, snapped where the force
exceeds the weight, clickings, pockets.
A long sigh through the land, an exhalation.

That five of these six lines are end stopped might suggest a degree of permanence in the river's structure, which indeed it has: its banks, though susceptible to alteration and collapse, are relatively stable, at least to the observer's eye. This appearance of permanence, though, is ultimately an illusion: the sense of sureness created by the end-stopped lines is undercut by the fact that each line is trying to describe the same thing and in some measure failing, thereby necessitating the next line. In this way the lines themselves, like the river, are "all content no meaning." They are the various long sighs, clickings, and pockets of the speaker's (or self's) stream of consciousness, itself reflected in and by the actual river, "the force of it and the thingness of it identical."

In a poem like A. R. Ammons's "Corsons Inlet" (also describing erosion) the observer is always present and distinct, but Graham's river subsumes the observer. In addition to "handfuls" and "limbs," it now acquires a "brown throat" (echoing the "brown god" of Eliot's "The Dry Salvages") and thus the capacity for "expression" that can eclipse the speaker's. That its speech is "all content no meaning" can be read in at least two ways: either "all content [and] no meaning" or "all content" (satisfied) "[that there is] no meaning." Each of these readings, though, requires that something be added to Graham's text; something important remains concealed. This is the dance of nondiscovery that, for Graham and others (like Ammons and Eliot) is poetry. Thus, just after describing the throat of the river and its enigmatic exhalation ("all content no meaning"), the poet focuses on her own respiratory and poetic capacities: "I put my / breath back out / onto the scented immaterial. How the invisible / roils." As her breath helps constitute the invisible air that roils like the river, the poet is linked to the river in a Whitmanesque moment of identification. Hence "Notes on the Reality of the Self," where the self is embodied in a river.

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Toward the end of the poem Graham hints more directly at this connection between the poet, the poem, and the river:

Is this body the one
I know as me? How private these words? And these? Can you
smell it, brown with little froths at the rot's lips,
meanwhiles and meanwhiles thawing then growing soggy then
the filaments where leaf-matter accrued round a
pattern, a law, slipping off, precariously, bit by bit,
and flicks, and swiftnesses suddenly more water than not.

The opening lines are perhaps the sort of thing we had first expected from a poem titled "Notes on the Reality of the Self," although the body here turns out, it seems, to be at least as much the river's, which has been coming into being throughout the poem (it now has "lips" to go with its other body parts), as the poet's own. The words uttered by the body seem private, and yet they are shared. Eventually even what is sealed and solidified ("a law") thaws, grows soggy, and is washed away in the river's current, "suddenly more water than not." The lips belong to "rot," and thus have as much to do with decomposition as with composition. Nothing is sealed off from erosion, errancy, decay. Even the laws that seemed absolute, even the absolute formulations concerning the nature of reality that Graham quotes throughout *Materialism*, are subject to these processes. Indeed, the placement of bits and pieces of them throughout her volume exemplifies and perhaps contributes to just this process.

After the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein felt that he had solved all the problems of philosophy. He later came to realize that he hadn't, that language can always make new and impossible demands, to which we must remain alert and responsive. In *Zettel* he writes of the experience (crucial to Graham's poetry) of being multilingual: "Being acquainted with many languages prevents us from taking quite seriously a philosophy which is laid down in the forms of any one" (§323), but we must be on guard as well, he says, against allowing our multilingualism itself to produce strong prejudices, to cast the spell of a particular picture. The *Tractatus* had cast just such a spell over Wittgenstein himself, a spell the combating of which required a responsible resistance not only to the demands and potential traps of language but to the pull of absolutism as well. In other words, Wittgenstein recognized that the very forces he sought to defeat constituted an integral part of his own work. Similarly, Graham's poetry resists

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the absolute formulations of Western philosophy while at the same time integrating them, refusing to be charmed by the formulations themselves or by the idea that she could possibly escape them. This "Notes on the Reality of the Self" concludes:

*The nature of goodness the mind exhales.
I see myself. I am a widening angle of
and nevertheless and this performance has rapidly—
nailing each point and then each next right point, inter-
locking, correct, correct again, each rightness snapping loose,
floating, hook in the air, swirling, seed-down,
quick—the evidence of the visual henceforth—and henceforth,
loosening—*

These exhalations of the mind mimic the activities of the river: they jar things loose from their banks, sending them forth, bobbing and errant, while at the same time producing sedimentation. Whereas in *Erosion* Graham was mesmerized by what the erosion of the right word shuts, throughout *Materialism* she is enthralled by how each right word, each right and meticulous formulation, snaps loose. Despite the difference between shutting and loosening, they seem similar features of a river, stable and dynamic. In an environment characterized primarily by motion, things "hook in the air," catch, and then snap loose again.

One might ordinarily think of thought as the product of generations of intellectual inheritance, as a process by which things are snapped into place, ordered, and systematized, not snapped loose, set adrift. Yet both are vital to thought's constitution. The snapping loose of words, concepts, and propositions; that is, is not antithetical to thought but the work of thought itself. The italicized fragments in these lines are snippets of philosophical argument dislodged from their moorings, gnawed, swallowed, and digested by the river's ceaseless motion. As the speaker walks alongside the river, gathering phrases and taking notes, it seems, for a philosophical poem, the river itself suddenly becomes the poem: "all content no meaning." Each point nailed is also a snapping loose, each shutting an opening; this is the restless content-ment of both the river and human language.

The final poem of *Materialism*, "The Surface" (143), eddies back to the volume's start, again describing the river's "re- / arrangements, chill enlightenments, tight-knotted / quickenings / and loosening." The first 21 of its 23 lines constitute a single meandering sentence that lik-

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ens the surface of the river to the surface of the poet's attention, while underneath these surfaces there lies "the slowed-down drifting / permanences / of the cold / bed." This phrase strikingly recalls Wittgenstein's geological metaphor, where the ground that we formerly thought immovable consists instead of just such "drifting / permanences." As William Bronk put it, "Earth and rocks of the earth used to be / our metaphor for unchanging—little we knew" (58).

§

Swarm is, undoubtedly, Graham's most difficult book. What are we to make of poems that, in their arrangement on the page, often look like ruins? While Willard Spiegelman admits that *Swarm* "continues to baffle or elude" him ("Talking" 183), his insightful criticism provides a good place to begin making a case for *Swarm*. He once wrote of Graham's penchant for "gaps, blanks, lacunae, dismembered sentences, [and] occasionally hallucinated fragments" ("Nineties" 233), and this little catalog is *Swarm* all over.

Avrum Stroll refers to Wittgenstein's later writings as a "broken text" that is "non-systematic, rambling, digressive, discontinuous, interrupted thematically and marked by rapid transitions from one subject to another" (93). While I would hesitate to call the *Investigations* "rambling" or even completely "non-systematic," Stroll's concept of the "broken text" has merit in that it distinguishes Wittgenstein's from "more standard, discursive forms of writing in which ideas are coherently organized and disseminated in larger units," forms of writing, that is, that display a certain architectonic confidence, a surety of design. Wittgenstein renounces any such claim to mastery in the preface to the *Investigations* when he refers to "all the defects of a weak draughtsman" (v) that characterize his book. He could not transpose the confidence of his architectural design for his sister's house to his later philosophical writings. This is not to say, however, that those writings are any less precise than the details of that design. Indeed, part of the precision of the *Investigations* is its own propensity for various and at times seemingly haphazard movements. "It often strikes us," writes Wittgenstein in *Zettel*, "as if in grasping meaning the mind made small rudimentary movements, like someone irresolute who does not know which way to go—i.e. it tentatively reviews the field of possible applications" (§33). These small, rudimentary movements of the

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mind, though, while irresolute, are neither arbitrary nor chaotic; as Stroll phrases it, "The use of the broken text is generally not accidental but purposive" (94). These sorts of movements, of course, direct us back to Graham, to her sentence fragments, gaps, and brief numbered sections, as if the poems had caught the dis-ease of the mind and could now proceed only via small, rudimentary movements and tentative reviews.

One might think that such broken text, which assembles units in bits and pieces rather than according to readily recognizable patterns, would be insufficient for the purposes of philosophical or poetic composition. But history, of course, has often suggested otherwise. Just as Graham's form of broken text has precedents in such precursors as Pound and Dickinson, so Wittgenstein's *Investigations* was preceded by Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* and Nietzsche's aphoristic assemblages. For Pound and Dickinson, the words often look like more or less dense clusters on the page, simultaneously held together and breaking apart, expressing in a poetic gesture both the strength and fragility of human thought and language. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, ideas and concepts teeter and veer, refusing to congeal into a system while at the same time (or by virtue thereof) attaining a coherence that makes up in maneuverability what it lacks in stability. Both Graham and Wittgenstein, then, inherit styles that appear to be broken or chaotic but nevertheless possess order and purpose.

Peter Miller writes of his astonishment on learning that ants are not, in fact, intelligent individuals, but rather depend on a scattered collective intelligence. He asks:

How do the simple actions of individuals add up to the complex behavior of a group? How do hundreds of honeybees make a critical decision about their hive if many of them disagree? What enables a school of herring to coordinate its movements so precisely it can change direction in a flash, like a single, silvery organism? (130)

In addition to ants, honeybees, and herring, he writes of starlings, wildebeests, locusts, fireflies, and, referring to recent attempts by humans to mimic this organizational intelligence, new methods in truck routing. Could he have added language to this list? Wittgenstein's later philosophy is built largely on the notion that the meaning of a word is its use, that isolated in a vacuum, it means nothing, or cannot even be a word. To

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understand the meanings of words one must master the technique of a language, and that is a highly complex, protean pattern that, like a river, is always shifting and changing its shape, breaking, shutting, and snapping loose, and yet for all that remaining relatively stable. According to Miller, swarm intelligence works by "simple creatures following simple rules, each one acting on local information. No ant sees the big picture" (132). This emphasis on local information corresponds to Wittgenstein's insistence that ordinary usage will suffice in rendering the meaning of a word, that philosophical questing after a "big picture," or ultimate meaning, will produce not meaning but confusion. "It is as if 'I know' did not tolerate a metaphysical emphasis," he writes (*On Certainty* §482).

"When a predator strikes a school of fish," writes Miller,

the group is capable of scattering in patterns that make it almost impossible to track any individual. [The school] might explode in a flash, create a kind of moving bubble around the predator, or fracture into multiple blobs, before coming back together and swimming away. (141)

In the swarm, then, the ability to break is a virtue. Substitute language for school of fish and philosopher for predator, and this sounds a lot like Wittgenstein's recollection of his and Russell's agonizing over the tendency of language to repeatedly make new and impossible demands, frustrating logical analysis again and again. Of course, in the end, the predator often enough comes away with something nourishing to show for its efforts, though the school survives the attack.

I offer the idea of language as a swarm neither as a solution to a problem nor as an explanation, but rather simply as a picture of the bit-by-bit formation of our systems of knowledge, a picture to be placed alongside Wittgenstein's and Graham's versions of such formations, versions that, while they may differ in aim, rationale, and other respects, share at least the crucial affirmation of errancy's role in the generation of meaning. Of course, to say "Language can or might be viewed like this" is not to say "Language is really this." Wittgenstein is reported to have remarked that to cook a person at 200 degrees Centigrade until all the water evaporates and to say that what remains is all the person really is, would be, at the least, misleading (*Lectures* 24).

Graham's *Swarm* invites us to consider plays on its title: *war* and *storm*, for instance, as the poems often look as though one or the other

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had blown through them; *shore*, perhaps, as the poems seem perched on a threshold where language disintegrates into the unknown; and *form*, of course, as a literary property to which the poems seem dedicated even as they erode it. These words make up a sort of swarm themselves, as do the poems in the volume, poems where Graham traces, exposes, and attempts to manipulate (though she is just as often manipulated by) those fault lines of language that enable it to shift and, occasionally, quake. "What isn't true but must be believed?" she asks in a poem dated and titled "5/3/98" (32), and "answers" the question thus: "What isn't but must be." The period would seem to imply that this is an answer to the question just asked, but it is also simply the question itself rewritten with two words left out. The gap is where "true" formerly resided, and the space for "believed" at the end of the formulation has been lopped off by the period. It is not so much an answer, then, as a mutilation or dissolving of the question. If we try to interpret it, we run up against the lacuna, staring back at us as persistently as Nietzsche's abyss. It is something that by its very nature isn't there, but must be.

The poem continues: "How strange. A mind made up." For Wittgenstein a system of beliefs, a mind, is made up bit by bit, constructed piecemeal, and he and Graham wonder at this and alertly resist any explanation of the matter under the aegis of behaviorism or constructivism. While such theories certainly account for some aspects of social and psychological phenomena, explaining away the strangeness of what they study discards a sizable portion of it. How strange that a mind should be made up, constructed bit by bit, but also how strange that a mind should be made up like a face—cosmetically, with the intent to enhance and conceal; and also how strange that a mind should be made up in the sense of resolved. How strange, even, that a mind should be made up in fiction, as in a story.

There are 16 poems called "Underneath" seemingly scattered at random throughout *Swarm*. Some have specific titles, others just numbers. The series, then, is another instance of the swarm. If it seems arbitrarily assembled, even chaotic, a swarm, as we've seen, is a kind of order agile and flexible enough to incorporate chaos. In fact, incorporating chaos (that ability to break randomly, for instance) perhaps gives the swarm its greatest strength. "Underneath (13)" begins: "needed explanation." Appearing on the 102nd of the volume's 110 pages, it seems to cast a backward glance on the volume as a whole. Throughout *Swarm*

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various speakers demand explanations of several things, from lines of Emily Dickinson poems to fundamental philosophical and mathematical concepts: "Explain door ajar" (55), "explain accident" (64), "Explain two are // Explain not one" (10), and so on. These demands, in some respect, are asking for explanations of things that form our "collective belief" and therefore are less subject to explanation than they are the very ground that allows for it. As Wittgenstein writes in the first remark of the *Investigations*: "Explanations come to an end somewhere," where "somewhere" is the bedrock of our activity. Similarly, in *On Certainty* he writes, "At some point one has to pass from explanation to mere description" (§189). The voices in *Swarm* demanding explanations are variously stubborn, ironic, innocent, and heartbroken. Wittgenstein maintains that our "life consists in [our] being content to accept many things" (§344), but the voices of *Swarm* seem to have lost, or to be on the brink of losing, just such contentment; their "judgment" therefore threatens to "go all to pieces" (§420). By the end of the volume they are understandably exhausted: "needed explanation" is as much a sigh as it is a demand, a weary exhalation that results from pertinaciously making demands that cannot be met. The many gaps in the rest of the poem, then, can be read as the necessary pauses between breaths of someone who is fatigued from despair.

Despair, though, is itself incomplete. The speaker of "Underneath (13)" declares, "I could not visualize the end // the tools that paved the way broke." These tools might be likened either to Hegelian concepts or to certain poetic techniques, so their being broken seems at first glance lamentable. Graham herself says in an interview with Thomas Gardner, "I feel like I'm writing as part of a group of poets—historically—who are potentially looking at the end of the medium itself as a vital part of their culture" (qtd. in *Regions of Unlikeness* 215). This end, she maintains, is to be ascribed just as much to poets shunning "mystery and power" as to larger cultural transformations. The result, it would seem, is a broken-down and increasingly useless set of tools. But if Graham laments this fact, she also sees in it a possibility. She acknowledges her own complicity in the process of breakdown (as one of that "group of poets") but sees it as ultimately desirable; after referring to the broken tools, the speaker flatly declares, "there is nothing wrong with the instrument." We might read this as a preemptive response to inevitable criticisms of *Swarm's* broken form. The tools of language are indeed broken, but the instrument of the

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voice, of poetry, is in some way enabled by this breakdown; the broken tool becomes, or is, the instrument. To break is a virtue of the swarm no less than of poetry itself and poetic tradition. Poetry does not require that language function entirely as a utility. In fact, in this stage of its development poetry might necessarily presuppose that language always already is (and was) broken, that its being broken is what enables poetry in the first place, less as a means of fixing language than as a means of voicing and affirming the conditions of language—conditions that resemble our own in both their limitedness and variability and seem in constant, even desperate, need of explanations that are either shut off or snapped loose.

§

The title poem of *The Errancy*, the volume that precedes *Swarm*, begins with a continuation: "Then the cicadas again like kindling that won't take." It goes on:

The struck match of some utopia we no longer remember the terms of—the rules. What was it was going to be abolished, what restored? (4)

Fast on the heels of and perhaps in distinct opposition to these unremembered terms—"what was going to be abolished," if "some utopia" is Plato's, was, among other things, poetry—come the numerous sounds of a seaside landscape: a foghorn, announcements of "unhurried arrivals," the "virgin-shrieks" of gulls, "subaqueous pasturings." That the utopia is recalled as a "struck match" implies an apocalypse, as if a utopia that would abolish poetry would abolish the world as we know it, but the flame does not or did not take, and those seaside sounds rush into the poem as, indeed, the poem itself rushes in. The foghorn, the announcements, and the gulls are all errant marks of sound that partially constitute *the* errancy, the definiteness of the article set off against the indefiniteness implied by the term that follows it. That the foghorn and the arrival announcements are no doubt purposive does not preclude them from being a part of this errancy, for any purposive sound is also necessarily errant, or "slippery" and "delinquent," like the cries of the gulls. The sounds in the opening lines include artificial sounds, the sounds of animals, and the sounds of the sea, those "subaqueous pasturings" that are, in turn, likened

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to handwriting and so linked back to the artificial. The handwriting of the sea continuously stirs up a froth that both erases the handwriting itself and is the condition on which the handwriting is predicated. The broken text of Graham's poem (its beginning with a continuation, the bit-by-bit assemblage of its syntax, its frequent ellipses and dashes, and the period-less "sentence" of its final 56 lines) affirms the errancy of language over against the thought of "some utopia" that would necessarily be cut clean from it in order to secure its existence.

"A context," writes Derrida, "is never absolutely closed, constraining, determined, completely filled" (217). This is to say that a context (or any text) is never completely private: "A structural opening allows it to transform itself or to give way to another context." This opening can be labeled in a variety of ways (freedom, perhaps, or intertextuality), but what is key is that it does not so much threaten meaning as guarantee it, provide a way or current where meaning can travel: "Every mark has a force of detachment which not only can free it from such and such a determined context, but ensures its principle of intelligibility and its mark structure." Without this force the mark would not be free to go forth in the world; it would be closed, sealed—not a mark at all. And while this force no doubt enables the mark to go astray, it also ensures its intelligibility. Derrida's positing of the mark's force is thus akin to Heidegger's assertion that we are always already thrown into the world. Like language, human beings are at the same time both destined and errant, a condition that Derrida calls our "destinerrancy" (218), or the destinerrancy of the mark. Wittgenstein's assertion at the outset of the *Investigations* that the meaning of a word is its use presupposes just this understanding of the structure of a mark. Far from concerning "utility," this assertion concerns the very nature of language as always making new and impossible demands and, as such, always loosening.

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The Calligraphy of Desire: Barthes, Sade, and Beckett's *How It Is*

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One is the victim of everything one writes.

—Samuel Beckett (qtd. in Abbott 109)

“If something is ‘communicated’ in writing,” Roland Barthes wrote, “it is not a reckoning, or ‘reason’ . . . but a desire” (“Masson’s Semiography” 155). Throughout his late work, and especially in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes worked out a poetics of such desire. At first glance, the world of Samuel Beckett seems far away from that of Barthes. Little pleasure is available to the inhabitants of Beckett’s texts, let alone Barthesian *jouissance*. Nevertheless, from its earliest expression in his 1931 study of Proust to its embodiment in his 1983 novella *Worstward Ho*, Beckett’s aesthetics has been fraught with questions of need and desire. But whereas Barthes presents the activities of reading and writing as a titillating striptease, for Beckett they have been sources less of inspiration than frustration, less of pleasure than suffering. Indeed, where for Barthes writing is a kind of *jouissance*, Beckett has remarked about his writing: “I’m working with impotence” (qtd. in Shenker 148). Nowhere in Beckett’s writings has the dilemma of the artist’s simultaneous obligation and inability to express been more elaborately, absurdly, or brutally explored than in his last major novel *How It Is*, a work that both anticipates Barthes’s poetics of desire and radically tests—or inverts—it.

How It Is comes after the period in which Beckett produced his major and best-known works, the trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*) and the plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. At the end of this period (the middle 1950s), Beckett felt himself to be at a particularly

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daunting aesthetic impasse, and in one of his few interviews of the time, he began to reformulate his position of frustrated need and desire in terms of the physical body:

there is a form, but it doesn't move, stand upright, have hands. . . . Being *has* a form. Someone will find it someday. Perhaps I won't but someone will. It is a form that has been abandoned, left behind, a proxy in its place. (qtd. in Harvey 249)

How It Is—written in French as *Comment c'est* in 1961 and published in English in 1964—is Beckett's effort to break through this impasse: to explore the possibilities of form as an abandoned body. It is, above all, a text of need and desire, in which the compulsions to speak and write are manifested in the impotent, abandoned bodies of the characters; the text itself, the narrator, and the characters are all permeated with tropes of the body, but it is the manual act of writing—a fascination he shares with Barthes—that Beckett explores most intently through a savagely literalized corporeal metaphor.

Desire in the mud: "Prior to the script"

How It Is is a complexly structured, black-humored exploration of Beckett's aesthetics of need. The narrator is naked, crawling on his belly in the dark through a world of mud. The framing structure and ultimate source of narrative authority are maddeningly elusive. Until the end, the narrator claims that a voice not his own is forcing itself through him, and thus that the text is one long quotation. (The refrains "I say it as I hear it" or "I quote" continually reassert this ventriloquy). The novel is divided into three parts, which the narrator refers to as journey, couple, and abandon. In the first, journey, the exhausted narrator crawls along by himself, experiencing dreamlike visions of a life "above in the light" (8), pausing occasionally to rest and eat a tin of prawns (stored in a sack he drags with him and opened with a tin opener which he puts to more sinister use later). In part two, he stumbles on another naked, crawling figure whom he names Pim and subjects to a brutal regimen of interrogation, conducted primarily by carving questions into Pim's back with his fingernails. Pim escapes the narrator in the final part of the novel, the abandon, and the narrator hypothesizes a vastly complex procession of victims and tormentors, of which he and Pim are a part. Ultimately, in a

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fit of self-interrogation that recalls his victimization of Pim, he declares his system to be "all balls" (159), and thus that his entire narration has been a fantasy, including the brutal episode with Pim and the existence of the voice. Here at the end the narrator assumes his narrative authority in the text and declares himself to be "sole responsible" (157) for the narrative.

Long before the narrator meets Pim in part two, Beckett blurs the boundary between the text and the physical body of the narrator/protagonist who produces it. The text is written in "gasps"; the rhetorical periods marked off by the blocks of text on the page are bounded by the physical capacity for breath of the narrator's laboring body, a capacity that changes with excitement, thought, and perhaps even physical exertion and rest. The narrator frequently reflects on the "brief movements of the lower face" (7) that accompany these words, insistently identifying speech with the motions of mouth and jaw, but also putting into question whether these "brief movements" are the cause or the consequence of the words, introducing a corporeal notion of language that will be extrapolated in excruciating detail in part two.¹

Beckett privileges the tactile relationship between the narrator and Pim. The actions of the narrator's hands and the contacts between their bodies play out a savage parody of Beckett's own expressive dilemma. The narrator discovers Pim in the last words of the first part as he reaches out in the dark to crawl forward: "the hand dips clawing for the take instead of the familiar slime an arse two cries one mute end of part one before Pim that's how it was before Pim" (54). Narrating the event again in the first pages of part two, the narrator relishes the cruelty of his initial grip: "Pim's right buttock then first contact he must have heard them [the narrator's fingernails] grate. . . I could have dug them in if I had wished I longed claw dig deep furrows drink the screams" (59).²

After discovering Pim, the narrator begins "training" him to speak. It is in these episodes of training and speech that Beckett most explicitly works out his bodily metaphors for aesthetic need. Initially, since he claims he cannot speak, he "communicates" with Pim through physical violence, and Pim responds through cries of anguish. Through a brutal series of "lessons" or "sessions" (68) the narrator establishes a series of signals—thumps on the head, gouges with the fingernails, jabs with the tin opener—that will elicit certain vocal responses from Pim.

In this early "training" period, Beckett parodies the model of the foundations of language ventured in the eighteenth century by Giambat-

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tista Vico. Beckett's first published work, an essay of 1929 titled "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce," explicated Joyce's use of Vico's model of history and language as "a structural convenience—or inconvenience" (22) in *Work in Progress* (later *Finnegans Wake*). Vichian references haunt the margins of Beckett's writing throughout his career, but in *How It Is*—a text that is very much about the foundations of language—Beckett most explicitly adopts Vico as a "structural convenience" of his own. Like Beckett's novel, Vico's model of history falls into three parts: the theocratic, the heroic, and the human age (22), corresponding to hieroglyphic, poetic, and discursive language. Joyce and Beckett are most interested in the earliest age, the hieroglyphic—where, Vico argues, word and thing were compressed in glyph or gesture.³ "In its first dumb form, language was gesture," Beckett wrote in 1929, and that is the situation encountered in *How It Is*. With Pim, Beckett's narrator is mute; he communicates only through the gestures of violence—scratching, stabbing, gouging the flesh of his narratee. He himself identifies the Vichian parallels of his situation, referring to this period as "training early days or heroic prior to the script" (67).

His first object is to make Pim sing on command:

first lesson theme song I dig my nails into his armpit right hand
right pit he cries I withdraw them thump with fist on skull his
face sinks in the mud his cries cease end of first lesson

second lesson same then nails in armpit cries thump on skull
silence end of second lesson all that beyond my strength (69)

The physical brutality of the training is emphasized from the start. The narrator speculates, for instance, on what to do "when clawed in the armpit long since an open sore for try a new place one is tempted desperation more sensitive the eye the glans no only confuse him fatal thing avoid at all costs" (70). Ultimately, the narrator's cruel program succeeds: "the day when clawed in the armpit instead of crying he sings his song. . . . that's not all he stopped nails in armpit he resumes cheers done it" (69–70). While he establishes the causal relationship between gouging Pim's body and the resulting song, he also notes that the signal to stop—the thump on Pim's skull—functions less as a signal to be understood than as a mechanical effect on the singer's body: "why mechanically why simply because it has . . . the effect of plunging the face in the mud the mouth the nose and even the eyes" (71). Like the words of the text that are mere

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by-products of the "brief movements of the lower face," Pim's song is the simple result of stimulating or smothering the body which produces it. Through violence and pain, Beckett depicts the origins of Pim's expression as brutally limited to the reactions of his tormented body.

The narrator's next project is to train Pim to speak. For this he uses the tin opener:

then with my right leg thrown crosswise imprison his two one
can see the movement take the opener in my right hand move it
down along the spine and drive it into the arse not the hole not
such a fool the cheek a cheek he cries I withdraw it thump on
skull the cries cease it's mechanical end of first lesson. (74)

After some confusion, the narrator once again makes a breakthrough with his student: "the day comes we come to the day when stabbed in the arse now an open wound instead of the cry a brief murmur done it at last" (75). Having established and elaborated on the brutal code, the narrator then provides a "table of basic stimuli" (76)

one sing nails in armpit two speak blade in arse three stop
thump on skull four louder pestle on kidney

five softer index in anus six bravo clap athwart arse seven lousy
same as three eight encore same as one or two as may be (76)

"The era of the script": Written wounds

Basic training completed, the novel enters into a phase that the narrator, half-quoting Vico's paradigm of civilization and language, calls the era of the "script" (77). From this point on, the novel proceeds as a record of the text the narrator cuts into Pim. He plainly announces his brutal, inscriptive project:

With the nail then of the right index I carve and when it breaks
or falls until it grows again with another on Pim's back intact at
the outset from left to right and top to bottom as in our civilisa-
tion I carve my Roman capitals. (77)

Significantly, the narrator is initially concerned with this grisly writing as script, emphasizing the graphic appearance of the text over its content.

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He says he carves "four full backs of close characters," describing his text as "unbroken no paragraphs no commas not a second for reflection with the nail of the index until the worn back bleeding passim" (78).⁴ When he does decide to provide "an example from among the simple from the early days or heroic" (78), the narrator nevertheless continues to focus his attentions on the physical inscription and spatial layout of the characters into/onto Pim:

with the nail then of the right index in great capitals two full lines the shorter the communication the greater the capitals one has only to know a little beforehand what one wants to say he feels the great ornate letter the snakes the imps God be praised it won't be long YOU PIM pause YOU PIM in the furrows here a difficulty has he grasped no knowing (78)

The narrator's interest in the scriptural or calligraphic presence of the text—its size, shape, and layout—is reflected in the typography of the novel itself, as the narrator's "Roman capitals" are duplicated and stand out against the field of lowercase type in which the rest of *How It Is* is set.⁵

Pim struggles to make out what he is being required to say—to "read" the words being cut into his back—and the narrator trains him with familiar, cruel patience:

simply try again not yet say die a good deep P and the apposite stab and inevitable one fine day should it mean his trying all the consonants in the Roman alphabet that he will answer in the end it's inevitable me Pim which he does in the end it was inevitable me Pim clap athwart the arse. (79)

Communication established, the narrator demands that Pim speak of his own life before arriving in the mud and darkness: "I nothing only say this say that your life above YOUR LIFE pause my life ABOVE long pause above IN THE in the LIGHT pause light his life above in the light" (79). Eventually Pim speaks of this life, his words (significantly) never recorded directly but filtered through the narrator. The narrator seizes on Pim's extorted autobiography and appropriates it for himself: "that life then said to have been his invented remembered a little of each no knowing that thing above he gave it to me I made it mine" (80). His hungry appropriation of Pim's autobiography helps suggest that these two characters are, like so many of Beckett's couples, two halves of a whole (like the artist/artisan faculties⁶ of consciousness set out in *Proust*).

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However, the demand that Pim speak his life story is also appropriate for a text that collapses language into the body, autobiography representing the history of the writer's own body.

The narrator savors the sheer physicality of his incised text. His attention to the excruciating nuances of his script emphasizes his act of writing as an act of wounding—of writing, once again, depicted as a bodily function. The narrator of *How It Is* is not the first of Beckett's characters to pay such careful attention to the scriptural act. Many of Beckett's previous narrators have been writers (albeit with pen or pencil on paper) and have paused in their narrations to scrutinize both the physicality of the writing act and the materiality of the written text it produces. Moran, one of the narrators of *Molloy*, for instance, soothes his own narratorial anxiety by focusing on the reassuring movements of his pen across the page: "I write them [these lines] all the same, and with a firm hand weaving inexorably back and forth and devouring my page with the indifference of a shuttle" (142). The clearest precursor to the narrator of *How It Is* in these terms is Malone, whose deathbed journal comprises the manuscript of *Malone Dies*, the second novel in the trilogy. In a moment that anticipates the attention paid to the inscribing fingernail of *How It Is*, Malone zooms in on the action of his dwindling pencil on the pages of his exercise book: "I hear the noise of my little finger as it glides over the paper and then that so different the pencil following after" (36).⁷ Even when deprived of bodies, Beckett's narrators have difficulty relinquishing the equation of language with a writing hand; the narrator of *The Unnamable*, a disembodied head in a jar, laments "How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly?" (17).

If the attention given to the implements and acts of inscription in *How It Is* draws explicit, if gruesome, parallels with prior narrators, such scenes also evoke subsequent poststructuralist theorists. The work of Roland Barthes, in particular, with its fetishistic delectation of the rituals and motions of writing, echoes the obsession with the tactile, material details of writing so emphasized by Beckett in *How It Is*. In an interview titled "An Almost Obsessive Relation to Writing Instruments," Barthes locates his personal writing habits within a paradigm of desire. Asked to describe how he begins a writing project, Barthes replies, "First comes the moment when desire is invested in a graphic impulse, producing a calligraphic object" (178). For Barthes (as for Beckett), writing is a materialization of "desire," which is not only dependent on the body but also finds its truest expression in metaphors of the body.

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"The hand which presses down": Hand/writing

Barthes insists that "Writing's truth is . . . [not in its messages or expressivity] but in the hand which presses down and traces a line, i.e. in the body which throbs (which takes pleasure)" ("Masson's Semiography" 154). Leaving aside for the moment the question of "pleasure" in Beckett, there can be no escaping the pressure of the inscribing hand in *How It Is*, a hand that "presses down" so viciously that the narrator's fingernail often "breaks or falls" (77) from the stress of manifesting his "graphic impulse."⁸ And like Beckett, Barthes insistently identifies the act of handwriting with the movements of the writing hand. For Barthes, every written or drawn line is haunted by the hand—the body—that produced it. Discussing Masson's painting, Barthes writes that it

refers us not to origins . . . but to the body: it imposes on us not the form . . . but the figure, i.e. the elliptical collision of two signifiers: the gesture beneath every ideogram as a kind of evaporated figurative outline, and the gesture of the painter, of the calligrapher, which makes the brush move according to his body. ("Masson's Semiography" 155)

The writing is the writing hand. Malone's pencil, we remember, "follow[s] after" his little finger. In this light, Moran's "firm hand" refers to both the fingers steadily gripping the pen and the assured script that Moran's pen traces on the page. Elsewhere Barthes defines calligraphy as being "that formed, drawn, deliberate, shapely writing which in the eighteenth century was called a *fine hand*." ("Cy Twombly" 158). Beckett also detects Masson's expressive dilemmas behind the gestures of his paintings: "I feel their presence not far behind these canvases veiled in consternation, and the scars of a competence that must be most painful to him" ("Three Dialogues" 140). However, whereas Barthes sees the brushstroke as the mark of the body, Beckett sees Masson's expressive gestures as "scars"—marks of and on the body. Again, the metaphor is literalized in *How It Is*: where the hand is literally the instrument of inscription (the fingernails), the narrator repeatedly associates the movements of his body (his hand) with the savage calligraphy cut into Pim's flesh (the body as inscriptive surface). He relishes the nuances of his gouging and wounding with a connoisseurship reminiscent of Barthes: "proof I need proof," he declares, "so stab him in a certain way signifying answer once and for all . . . a special stroke inde-

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scribable a trick of the hand" (79). Shortly thereafter he cuts "a good deep P" into Pim. Later, while cutting the word *END* into Pim, he pauses to savor the writing not only letter by letter, but—a true calligrapher—stroke by stroke: "E then good and deep quick now the end . . . and nail on skin for the down-stroke of the Roman N" (97). It is not the writing but the act of writing—the motions of "the hand that presses down"—which the narrator relishes: the desire behind the "graphic impulse" rending his victim's flesh to render it a "calligraphic object."

While Barthes reads in writing the traces of desire left behind by the body of the writer, Beckett compresses the writer's body and expressive desires still more densely into the act of writing. The fingernail as stylus collapses the distinction between hand and pen, body and tool. The skin, demarcating self and world, is pierced by the body of the other; the boundary between writer and reader is physically transgressed when Pim "reads" the text cut into his own skin. The fact that, in *How It Is*, the act of writing takes place though the medium of the body—with fingernails as stylus and flesh as surface—grounds expressive desire, even more completely than in Barthes, in corporeal (even sexual) terms. In *A Lover's Discourse*, remarking on the urgent desire aroused through the accidental touch of the beloved, Barthes seems to describe the grappling couple of *How It Is*:

Every contact, for the lover, raises the question of an answer: the skin is asked to reply. . . . Meaning (destiny) electrifies by hand; I am about to tear open the other's opaque body, oblige the other (whether there is a response, a withdrawal, or a mere acceptance) to enter into the interplay of meaning: I am about *to make the other speak*. (67–68)

The violence of Barthes's language is the violence of passion, but in *How It Is* Barthes's figures are literalized—Pim's flesh is literally torn in the narrator's urgent desire "*to make the other speak*."

Reading in the dark

Because the body of the narrator is the inscribing implement and the body of the recipient is the surface of inscription, the physicality of the writer's calligraphic "hand" in *How It Is* never recedes into trace or memory, as Barthes would have it. Rather, "the gesture" Barthes senses

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"beneath every ideogram" inheres in the memory of the written wound. In *How It Is*, as in Vico, "language [is] gesture." In the novel, however, the gesture is not the mute indexical sign of Vico's hieroglyphic age but the path that the hand incises as it writes, transmitted directly from body to body. To both the narrator and Pim, this script is legible only as gesture, not as alphabet.

In *How It Is*, writing is blind. The script must be tactile rather than visual because, crawling in utter darkness, neither writer nor reader can see the writing that passes between them (and since the script is carved into Pim's back—where he could not see it even if there were light—the reader in this novel is doubly blind to the text intended for him). Groping about the frail form of Pim, the narrator himself cannot experience his inscribed text as anything other than the instant point of contact. Because he cannot see to read his own text after he has written it, he cannot re-experience previous letters or words except in the tactile, gestural memory held in his own hand. His writing evaporates as quickly as his nails glide through Pim's skin. He is trapped in the perpetual present of the strokes of his own calligraphy.

Pim, on the other hand, experiences the moving point of the writing nail as pain. Like the narrator, his memory of the script is tactile—bodily—an imaginary picture of the "roman capitals" being traced in pain on his back. But as the narrator remarks, his back will become "uniformly sensitive" (79); the deep strokes inscribed in him will disperse into a general field of pain, and his experience of the narrator's writing will become, like the writer's, limited strictly to the moving point of inscription across his "worn back bleeding passim" (78). Pain here functions as color does in Barthes's reading of Masson, where color "must not be understood as a background against which certain characters 'stand out' but rather as pulsion's entire space" ("Masson's Semiography" 154).

This moving point of inscription—the instant of writing, rich in potentiality and desire—is very like the moment of drawing that fascinates Jacques Derrida in *Memoirs of the Blind*. There Derrida sees all drawing as a groping in the dark—a metaphor literalized in the entire narrative situation of *How It Is*. Derrida asks,

What happens when one writes without seeing? A hand of the blind ventures forth alone or disconnected, in a poorly delimited space; it feels its way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes, trusting in the memory of signs and the supplementing sight. (3)

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What interests Derrida most—and what Beckett explores in *How It Is*—is the instant-by-instant mystery of the drawn line, concealed from the eye by the very hand that produces the mark. Derrida's description of this mysterious emergence of calligraphy from beneath the moving hand seems a gloss on Beckett: "at the instant when the point at the point of the hand (of the body proper in general) moves forward upon making contact with the surface, the inscription of the inscrutable is not seen" (45). (Again, Malone's little finger preceding his pencil also precedes Derrida's image). Of course, responding immediately through his body rather than secondarily through his eye, Pim would qualify to Derrida that at this instant, the inscription of the inscrutable *hurts*.

Just as Derrida's blind artists eagerly anticipate visual confirmation of the line they intended to draw as they are drawing it, so do the calligrapher and calligraphied in *How It Is* anticipate the paths and intention of the written wound. Early in the period of "the script," Pim deduces with relief that, by the size of the letters carved into him, the message will be brief: "he feels the great ornate letter . . . God be praised it won't be long" (78). Later, Pim does not wait for the torturous inscription to be completed. The narrator asks "if he likes to sing no but sometimes he sings yes always the same song pause SAME SON yes" (106). By eliminating vision from his model of writing and reading, Beckett concentrates his characters' experience at the very instant of desire and writing, short-circuiting the entire mental and visual operation surrounding writing and reading in favor of a physical and tactile process.

Like Barthes and Derrida, Beckett sees the physical gestures of writing as an inscription of desire, but *How It Is* literalizes the metaphor of the body to a more extreme degree, especially Barthes's metaphor of artistic expression as cutting and ripping at language. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes describes the "bliss" of writing in terms of cutting, lacerations, gaps, and seams,⁹ admiring "the deep lacerations the text of bliss inflicts upon language itself" (12). In a letter written in 1937, Beckett anticipates this metaphor of art as ripping holes in language, or what he called "the terrible materiality of the word surface" ("German Letter" 172):

As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.

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How It Is bores such holes. Not only is the metaphor of writing as incision literalized in the script carved into Pim, but the blank space that disrupts the pages of *How It Is* typographically suggests the "nothing" behind the text: "the silence that underlies All" as Beckett calls it ("German Letter" 172). Such gaps in language—pauses for breath—are, moreover, embodied silences, the textual/typographical manifestation of the absence of speech, framed by speech and the breath. Commenting on them, the narrator notes how he forces Pim's speech with the tin opener when Pim's "gaps" become too wide:

the gaps are holes otherwise it flows more or less more or less profound the holes we're talking of the holes not specified not possible no point I feel them and wait till he can out and on again or I don't and opener or I do and opener just the same that helps him out. (93)

Barthes's text of bliss—lacerating the body of language and closely inspecting the wounds—flirts with eroticized metaphors of the body. Beckett's text of suffering, *How It Is*, consummates the erotic relationship between writing and desire in the lacerations inflicted on the body of its embedded reader, Pim, and the narrator's close inspection of the written wounds.

"DO YOU LOVE ME":

Questions of suffering and desire

In inverting the climactic *jouissance* ventured in Barthes's model of desire, the gouging of Pim introduces a suffering—even perhaps a sadism—absent in Barthes. Writer and reader in Barthes are lover and beloved, playing out a game of seduction through the body of the writing; in *How It Is* writer and reader are tormentor and victim, locked in an urgent scene of torture. Nonetheless, *How It Is* is ridiculously, self-parodically, sexually suggestive. The narrator gropes and crawls over Pim's naked body, intertwines his body with Pim's in a series of intimate postures, and vigorously prods his buttocks and anus with tin opener and finger in scenes that mock the caresses of lovers. Indeed, the narrator interrogates Pim on exactly this subject, cutting into his back, in deep Roman capitals, "DO YOU LOVE ME" (83). Not surprisingly, Pim answers "no." But he and the narrator

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are a strangely happy couple, at least in terms of Beckett's field of possible happiness. The couple in Beckett's work is always a positive thing—two halves of a whole—regardless of the terms of their coupling; and the loss of the partner is always to be lamented. As in Sade, cruelty and torture in *How It Is* yield a perverse—or reverse—sort of pleasure, which to be understood requires a series of Beckettian inversions and double negatives.

How It Is thus maintains Barthes's forms of writing and desire while inverting the emotional energies of their content. If the second part of the novel, the couple, is a Vichian/Joycean "lovegame of the children,"¹⁰ and the "couple" relationship reflects a desirous, bodily, inscriptive relationship, even the absence of Pim in part three, insistently called the abandon, obeys a Barthesian structure of love. In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes notes that the absence of the loved one is a figure of romantic discourse, characterizing such discourse as "Any episode of language which stages the absence of the loved object—whatever its cause and its duration—and which tends to transform this absence into an ordeal of abandonment" (13), a definition that could serve as a précis of part three of *How It Is*. Whereas Beckett in *Proust* suggested that art is driven by the subject's unsatisfied desire for its object (3) and later offered the refinement that art manifests a "need to need" ("Intercessions" 91), Barthes provocatively compresses his own language of desire into Beckett's language of need: "Absence is the figure of privation; simultaneously, I desire and I need. Desire is squashed against need: that is the obsessive phenomenon of all amorous sentiment" (16). By turning erotic desire to expressive, physical violence while maintaining the structure of the coupling, Beckett's novel offers an ironic re-vision of Barthes in the same mode as Barthes's own re-reading of Sade in *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*. Barthes focuses on the forms of Sade's work, noting that it is not Sade's violent, sexual content that is compelling—"erotic," in Barthes's special sense—but his obsessively combinatory form. *How It Is* can be read, then, as a Sadean inversion of Barthes—one that confirms even as it challenges and expands on his erotics of writing.

Barthes's 1971 study of Sade emphasized Sade's achievement as a formalist, as a writer who lacerated the codes of language. In 1938, Beckett turned down a commission to translate Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* into English due to concerns about legal repercussions on his own publishing career, but he nevertheless considered *120 Days* to be "one of the capital works of the 18th century" and declared that in Sade's novel "The obscenity of surface is indescribable. Nothing could be less pornographical. It fills

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me with a kind of metaphysical ecstasy. The composition is extraordinary, as rigorous as Dante's" (qtd. in Knowlson 269). Beckett's assessment of Sade's achievement as a formalist—rather than as a pornographer—anticipates Barthes's analysis by 30 years, and the connection between Dante and Sade in terms of their permutative imaginations anticipates several scenarios in Beckett's own later fiction, most strikingly the "procession" hypothesis of the third part of *How It Is*.

The narrator of *How It Is* himself speculates as to the "sadistic" nature of his relationship with Pim. Projecting himself into Pim's mind at the early stages of the "training," the narrator asks if Pim might not see his motives as "sadism pure and simple" but answers "no since I [Pim] may not cry" (70). Furthermore, although the narrator postulates that he and Pim are part of an elaborate system of victims and tormentors, he also rejects the terms "victim" and "tormentor" as being "too strong" (124). Given the brutality with which desire is expressed in this novel, the narrator's (and Beckett's) reluctance to characterize it as "sadism pure and simple" is puzzling at first. However, Beckett would no doubt agree with Barthes that "Sadism is only the coarse (vulgar) *contents* of the Sadean text" (Sade 170). Barthes notes that in Sade "the victim is not he or she who submits, but he or she who uses a certain language" (140). In *How It Is* it is likewise the use of language that distinguishes victim from tormentor. Unlike Sade, Beckett's narrator-tormentor is mute; his only communication with Pim is through the language of his inscriptions (a nightmarish hybrid of Vico and Sade). It is Pim—the victim—who speaks. In short, as in Sade (as both Beckett and Barthes read him), the figures of the relationship between tormentor and victim are much more important in *How It Is* than the pleasure of torment.

"Pure interrogation": Writing is torture

Carved into Pim's back, the calligraphic "script" becomes a spur to speech. As early as 1938 Beckett had declared that "art has always been this—pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric" ("Intercessions" 91). In *How It Is* the "pure interrogation" of writing is still purer and the questions still less rhetorical: the act of posing the question is identical with extorting the answer. Writing, here, becomes torture,¹¹ initiating an important trope in Beckett's work and literalizing his previous anguished metaphors for the writer's dilemma.¹² It returns, for example, in 1973 in

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"As the Story Was Told," where, at some distance from the narrator, another man is subjected to "sessions" (the same word used for Pim's training) to extract a statement that will deliver him.¹³ And torture recurs in Beckett's late play *What Where*, in which characters give each other "the works" (312) offstage in order to extract confessions, and in *Catastrophe*, in which the entire apparatus of theatrical production is depicted as torment of the actor's passive body, with the director as grand inquisitor.

In *How It Is*, the narrator's interrogation of Pim becomes increasingly savage as Pim's ability to answer his questions wanes. Late in part two, the narrator is frustrated in his efforts to have Pim describe his life in the mud. As the pitch of his interrogation increases, the wounds his questions produce on Pim become deeper:

YOUR LIFE HERE long pause YOUR LIFE HERE good and
deep long pause . . . YOUR LIFE . . . HERE to the quick . . .
HERE HERE to the bone the nail breaks quick another in the
furrows HERE HERE howls thump the whole face in the
mud . . . HERE HERE to the marrow howls . . . until at last
good he wins life here this life he can't (105)

Clawing through skin, bone, and marrow, breaking his own nails in his desire to extract a voice from Pim, the narrator is actually working toward extorting the truth about his own authorship of the entire text: the truth about his identity with Pim.

After Pim abandons the narrator, in part three the prospect of torture and interrogation is turned against the narrator himself. Having tormented Pim, he now assumes he will soon be the victim of another crawler, advancing from behind him, whom he names Bom (like one of the permutative tormentor/victims in *What Where*). Bom will subject him to a similar regimen of verbal extortion until, repeating the cycle, he can "abandon" Bom in turn. Part three develops according to the structure of a Sadean (or Dantean) formalist fantasy, as the narrator imagines a potentially infinite series of crawlers in the mud, alternating as victims and tormentors:

and how there are three of us four a million and there I am always was with Pim Bom and another and 999997 others journeying alone rotting alone martyring and being martyred . . .

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and there I am always was with Pim Bom innumerable others in a procession without end or beginning languidly wending from left to right straight line eastward strange in the dark the mud sandwiched between victim and tormentor (138-39)

Unlike Sade's, however, the permutations of physical torment here are limited, each figure interacting only with the crawler immediately ahead or behind him: "similarly if a million strong each knows personally only his tormentor and victim in other words him who comes immediately behind him and him who goes immediately before him" (129).¹⁴

Although he announces that "we shall never see Bom at work" (142) in a hypothetical part four of the cycle, toward the end of his theorizing the narrator begins to interrogate himself "in the familiar form of questions I am said to ask myself and answers I am said to give myself" (157). These questions unfold in the same tone he previously took with Pim. He begins smoothly, but soon finds himself locked in an autointerrogation as fierce as any he inflicted on Pim:

this business of a procession yes never any procession no nor
any journey no never any Pim no any Bom no never anyone
no only me no answer only me yes so that was true yes it was
true about me yes and what's my name no answer WHAT'S MY
NAME screams good (159)¹⁵

Suddenly the typography of the text bursts into the "Roman capitals" previously reserved for those cut into Pim, producing "screams" of expressive anguish from the narrator. The narrator's autointerrogation collapses the violence of artistic expression into a single figure—himself. He tortures himself into the admission (or discovery) that he is his own tormentor. Just as the wounding calligraphy closed the gap between the narrator as subject and Pim as object in part two, in part three typography incorporates into the narrator the roles of both tormentor and victim in his effort to speak in "a voice of my own" (38).

The conclusion of *How It Is* mirrors Beckett's reformulation of the bodily metaphors of writing and need in his own aesthetics. By writing *How It Is*, he overcomes the artistic impasse of the trilogy by extorting a new aesthetic metaphor out of the body of his own work. After this text, in which writing is indistinguishable from wounding, Beckett settles on a new metaphor for artistic inscription: the scar, the self-inflicted wound.

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He confirms this metaphor in the short *témoignage* "For Avigdor Arikha," written in 1966, two years after the completion of *How It Is*:

Siege laid again to the impregnable without. Eye and hand fevering after the unself. By the hand it unceasingly changes the eye unceasingly changed. Back and forth the gaze beating against unseeable and unmakeable. Truce for a space and the marks of what it is to be and be in face of. Those deep marks to show.

The "deep marks" here echo the strokes cut "good and deep" into Pim's back, conflating writing with the body of the writer. Just as Moran's "firm hand" describes both his body and his script, Beckett's new aesthetic model collapses the gestures of making art with the artwork itself. Barthes saw this in the ideograms of Masson, sensing "the gesture beneath every ideogram as a kind of evaporated figurative outline, and the gesture of the painter, of the calligrapher, which makes the brush move according to his body" ("Masson's Semiography" 155), where Beckett, prefiguring himself, saw in Masson the "scars of a competence that must be most painful to him" ("Three Dialogues" 140). In "For Avigdor Arikha," text and writer dissolve together, as they do in *How It Is*. The "deep marks" of the artistic "siege" are scored into both the artwork and the artist—syntactically indistinguishable in this short piece—as art, for Beckett, becomes a self-inflicted wound, its scars retracing the calligraphy of desire. The vision of the artwork (the artifact produced and the work of producing art) as scarification radically incorporates the physical, gestural, bodily manifestations of aesthetic desire worked out in *How It Is* and offers up a new, mute gesture made simultaneously by artwork and artworker: those deep marks to show.¹⁶

Notes

1. In all Beckett's works, the journeys his narrators undertake are reflections of their artistic trajectories. In *How It Is* the ridiculously physical effort of the mud journey, with its incremental advances and frequent stops, is a metaphor for the artistic state of Beckett's exhausted narrator. A more complex metaphorical chain is at work in the novel, however, to link the crawling passage of the narrator to the effort of narration. The narrator frequently comments on how the mud sloshes into his mouth and how his tongue "lolls in the mud" (9 and passim), especially during the "brief movements of the lower face" as-

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sociated with words. He goes on to speculate that the mud is actually the shit of other crawlers (58). While this coprophagous image may suggest Sade, the narrator also adopts a bodily metaphor from Beckett's *Texts For Nothing*: "wordshit" (100). Beckett's punning notion that his words are "fundamental sounds" ("On *Endgame*" 109) is reprised when the *How It Is* narrator compares his speech to "a fart fraught with meaning issuing through the mouth" (29). The mud-shit-fart-language chain of excrescent metaphors at work in *How It Is* reinforces language as a bodily function.

2. For reasons that become clearer toward the end of the novel, the narrator's encounter with Pim is as much a creation as it is a discovery. The narrator shapes Pim out of the mud in a clear parody of Genesis, but does so in terms that also allude to James Joyce: "but for me he would never . . . be but for me anything but a dumb limp lump flat for ever in the mud but I'll quicken him you wait and see and how I can efface myself behind my creature when the fit takes me now my nails" (58). The reference to Joyce's artist who, "like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, paring his fingernails" (219) is all the more ironic when we see what the narrator actually does with his fingernails when he gets "behind" his "handiwork."

3. Vico writes:

In their mute condition, [the first pagan people] expressed themselves by using gestures and objects naturally related to their ideas, such as three ears of grain or three scythe strokes to mean three years. (172)

4. This unbroken, unpunctuated text should not be confused with a description of *How It Is* itself. Typographically, this description is closer to the other monologic novels of the trilogy, especially *The Unnamable*. The typographical form of *How It Is* manifests the narrator's own body through its gasps and gaps of speech, but not the inscribed body of Pim.

5. Beckett was concerned with the impression made by the page layout of the text. Frederick N. Smith traces his process of fragmentation in composing the novel, from his decision in the early French drafts to alternate blocks of text with white space to his concern with the galleys of the first English version that "there must never be a full line at foot of page" (Beckett qtd. in Smith 118). As with his narrator's, the spatiality of his text was an important component of its meaning.

6. "The artist has acquired his text: the artisan translates it" Beckett argues in *Proust* (64). A similar disguised double identity exists between the inspiring (in the literal, etymological sense) voice and the panting narrator.

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7. Malone's notebook persists in *How It Is* in the colored notebooks and ball-point pens of the hypothetical scribes Krim and Kram, whose notebooks provide quoted "samples extracts" (88) before ultimately being declared fictitious.

8. Indeed, in his own assessment of Masson, Beckett offers a similarly painful image of the body: "he is an artist who seems literally skewered on the ferocious dilemma of expression. Yet he continues to wriggle" ("Three Dialogues" 140). In *How It Is*, of course, the "ferocious dilemma of expression" leads to a still more literal skewering and wriggling impalement. While both Beckett and Barthes take André Masson as a touchstone for their aesthetic writings and see provocatively similar things in (and behind) his paintings, it is wise to remember that each writer is discussing Masson at a different phase of his development as a painter. Beckett writes of Masson in 1949, immediately before Masson began to produce the ideogram-style works that Barthes addresses in the mid-1950s. The resonance, of course, between their understandings of Masson's paintings lies in the degree to which Beckett detects an expressive dilemma behind Masson's work that is rearticulated—if not resolved—in the ideogrammatic works that follow, and which so fascinate Barthes.

9. Barthes locates the pleasure of reading Sade in the "collisions" (*Pleasure* 6) of discourse in his writing (passages of philosophy meeting those of pornography), noting that the pleasure happens along the seams of language:

the language is redistributed. Now, such redistribution is always achieved by cutting. Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge . . . and *another edge*, mobile, blank . . . the place where the death of language is glimpsed. These two edges, *the compromise they bring about*, are necessary. Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. (7)

Barthes goes on to locate this eroticism in Sade and in the body:

The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely novelistic instant so relished by Sade's libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss.

10. Beckett explains that Vico's second age appears in *Finnegans Wake* as "the lovegame of the children, corresponding to the second institution, Marriage" ("Dante" 22).

11. For another reading of torture in *How It Is*, see Gary Adelman. While Adelman explores the relation of torture to art in Beckett's novel, his reading differs from mine on several structural, thematic, and aesthetic points, not least in

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that he concludes that "Art cannot stop the process of torture. The witness can change nothing. . . . He tortures himself because there is no one else to torture, to know by the pain that he still exists" (90). I would argue that torture, as Beckett deploys it in his writings, is a self-contained and artistic issue rather than an ethical, interpersonal, one. Art cannot stop the process of torture in *How It Is* because art is identical with it.

12. In the trilogy, for instance, Molloy speaks of "imperatives" (*Molloy* 92) forcing him to write and describes his expressive dilemma as "Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying" (29). The Unnamable frequently depicts his situation as being interrogated by a "college of tyrants" (*Unnamable* 26), forced to utter a "pensum" or "lesson" he cannot recall "before I have the right to stay quiet in my corner, alive and dribbling, my mouth shut, my tongue at rest, far from all disturbance, all sound, my mind at peace, that is to say empty" (27). While the ventriloquial structure of *The Unnamable* persists in *How It Is*, the shift from a verbal interrogation to bodily torture is as much an intensification of kind as of degree of torment.

13. These sessions are said to be of a "harrowing nature" (103), echoing the Harrow, the inscribing apparatus of Kafka's torture machine in "In the Penal Colony," which executes prisoners by repeatedly inscribing the law they had violated on their flesh with metal needles.

14. The vision of a procession of blind crawlers thus anticipates Derrida's description of blind man's bluff in *Memoirs of the Blind*: "isn't the point to designate a relay by touching—as well as naming—a successor in the dark?" (95–97). Or as the *How It Is* narrator puts it, "instead of me sticking the opener into Pim's arse Bom sticking it into mine" (142).

15. The revelation that the permutative tortures of the procession are in fact the fantasy of a single, solitary imaginer also recalls Sade's combinative fantasies, constructed from within his solitary cell.

16. The silent offering up of scars presages a new era of silence and gesture in Beckett's late fiction. After *How It Is*, few of Beckett's characters are writers; most are either silent figures, communicating through stylized, hieroglyphic gestures, or trapped figures, their bodies often scarred or dismembered (as in "Ping," "For to End Yet Again," "Imagination Dead Imagine," or "All Strange Away"). In all cases their bodies are inspected by narratorial eyes, are being read as closely as texts.

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“Part of the War Waste”:

Pound, Imagism, and Rhetorical Excess

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In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935), Pound asserts that “London stank of decay back before 1914 and I have recorded the feel of it in a poem here and there” (48). Elsewhere in that book he offers an odd prescription to go along with his cultural diagnosis: “I am a flat-chested highbrow. I can ‘cure’ the whole trouble simply by criticism of style. Oh, can I? Yes. I have been saying so for some time” (17). How “criticism of style” might cure London’s stench of decay probably ought to elude us; the links in the chain of argument are occluded, if they were ever developed at all. Instead, Pound refers his readers to a long record of similarly strident allegations, a chain of transmission stretching back to his first published essays. But since he doesn’t bother to rehash his arguments—even while basing his entire case for Mussolini on his cultural prescription—Pound clearly means his readers to accept his claim as a given, if only because of its repetition.

“Criticism of style” here refers to Pound’s rejection of the aesthetics of pre-1914 Edwardian England in favor of the style of discursive political works like *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*. His curious habit of conflating aesthetic taste with political dogma may confuse the reader not already familiar with his idiosyncratic mode of argumentation, since it strips his argument of conventional, causal, dependent arrangement of logical propositions and advances quickly, and repeatedly, from bold claim to strident impatience that the claim has not been accepted. But clearly this tactic has consequences for his career’s poetic and discursive efforts, ranging from early interrogation into the causes of the Great War to his late endorsement of Mussolini’s fascism. An investigation into Pound’s rhetorical praxis, into his requirement of acquiescence from his readers

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in following often abrupt and jarring juxtapositions, can illuminate how he declares himself in favor of brevity, precision, and the ability of fact to speak for itself even as he repeats himself ad nauseam. Both the absolute poetic authority and the polemical call for minimalism on which Pound predicates imagism lead him to castigate the openness of symbolism, the suspicious vagueness of political rhetoric, and the usury he detested in world finance: all betray an uncontrollable excess he found anathematic.

Recent studies of Pound have tended to assume a teleological trajectory in his work toward the horror of his Rome Radio broadcasts and have attempted to diagnose key elements of his totalizing (totalitarian, in fact) World War II persona. Tim Redman and Lawrence Rainey have focused on Italian fascism and Pound's hero worship of Mussolini; Robert Casillo has concentrated on his growing anti-Semitism; Leon Surette emphasizes Pound's confused economic theories; and Paul Morrison develops the extent to which he (and fascist poetics in general) suppressed an overly mobile rhetorical tropology. These studies overlap in their interests, each attempting to account for the obviously complex and multiple reasons why Pound the poet became Pound the propagandist. And while each holds as a commonplace that Pound mistrusted rhetoric and sought to substitute his own nonce prose style for rhetorical excess in much the same way that his poetic abjured the traditional pentametric line for accentual vers libre, only a few studies have made his rhetorical strategies their primary subject.

Morrison's *Poetics of Fascism* joins with multiple poststructuralist critiques from the Derridean 1980s in diagnosing Pound's attempts to reign in the logopoeic function of metaphor, stamp a permanent coherence between sign and referent, and thereby stay the catachrestic play of signifier and signified. Such studies reach back to the beginnings of Pound's career to show his fundamental misunderstanding of metaphoric vehicles and pursue his frustration with usury, currency exchange, and symbolism along the same lines: his impatience with the associative register of metaphor is roughly analogous to his protestations against inflationary money and lending interest. But while I agree that many of Pound's signature poetic innovations evince a preference for metonym over metaphor, for the appearance, at least, of syntagmatic contiguity between sign and referent rather than complete paradigmatic substitution of a tenor by a vehicle, his personal preference does not justify the sweeping diagnosis, nor does it explain his appreciation and impresario support for poetics employing the paradigmatic and the logopoeic, such as Yeats's, H.D.'s, and Eliot's.

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Instead, I suggest we historicize Pound's use of the term *rhetoric* in his postwar prose by examining it as a situated marker alluding to specific cultural events and associations, rather than taking it in its current meaning. Pound consistently employed anaphora in both poetry and prose, for example, and he had no problem with argumentation in his own propaganda. He detested certain types of rhetorical tactics only after isolating specific rhetoricians who had misused them. Furthermore, once he found in Mussolini an orator whose style and tastes seemed to match his own, he became a fascist partisan until long after Mussolini's death, despite *Il Duce's* own rhetorical casuistries.¹ To locate the way Pound hoped for his idiosyncratic persuasive style to serve as polemic and corrective within a historical trajectory, I draw on Vincent Sherry's recent study of linguistic responses to the rhetoric that first alerted Pound (among others) to the "stench of decay" emanating from London. As I will show, his habit of ostensibly arguing against argument, of eschewing hypotaxis and syllogism, and even of conflating multiple discourses into symptomatic wholes can be traced to his initial reaction to wartime rhetoric.

Sherry locates the appearance of new English idioms in the popular revulsion to the rationalizations that the Liberal ministry gave the public for intervening in World War I. The appearance of modernist "pseudostatement," literary approximations of the specious truth-stretching of official England, parodied the idiom of coherent common sense and logic that, he argues, lay at the core of Liberal faith in progress, self-determination, and fair play—a faith that, once disturbed, threatened the entire intellectual enterprise (18). For poets like Pound, this represented an opportunity to emphasize

the discrepancy between the intellectual principles and the practical actualities of British Liberalism. While this partisan faith was committed to the preponderance of public reason in the deliberations of policy, its representatives had also pledged the nation, through a series of secret agreements . . . to an inarguable involvement in a Continental war. (21)

The result is a "systematic tension" readily exploited by the high modernists (in Sherry's study, Pound, Eliot, and Woolf), which, while it certainly represented a "vanguard consciousness" of the government's duplicity, nevertheless constituted a recognizable intervention for readers beginning to grapple with what had been done behind closed doors in their name.

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Pound consistently provides both diagnosis and prescription for cultural ills to his audience, and his style of persuasion represents the alternative to the rhetoric that his prose critiques. He expected his readers to recognize his use of the term *rhetoric* as a heuristic for the Liberal abuse of conventional rhetorical rationalization. Apart from that, he consistently avoids the term until he becomes a fascist partisan in the 1920s. Instead of florid, obfuscating devices, he prefers the luminous detail, the radiating historical fact, alive with autotelic significance, as he imagines it, even as it resists being appropriated by an unscrupulous orator to nefarious ends. And he prefers referring to past details over rejustifying that which he believes needs no justification; to return to the example of *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*, he considers it better to leave off with "I have been saying so for some time" than to reargue his critique of London's rhetorical style, even though this is his first attempt to argue for fascism to an American audience.² But since Pound was still capable after World War II of casting his entire career as a hunt for the guilt behind the Great War,³ my task here is to trace how his profoundly ethical response to Liberal misdeeds and his rejection of conventional rhetorical tactics in favor of juxtaposition of logical fragments ultimately turned into fascist partisanship.

§

Gaudier-Brzeska (1916), commemorating Pound's friend the vorticist sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, killed in the war, serves Gaudier-Brzeska's memory by including his manifesto contributions to the two *Blasts* and 30 photographic plates of his sculptures and engravings. But, emphasizing Pound's periodical assessments of Gaudier-Brzeska as a vorticist whose techniques were consistent with prewar imagism's ethos, the book also becomes an attempt at revisionist history. The imagists, Pound claims, were against the stylistic cause of the war even before war had been declared, and long before those causes had come to light.

Pound begins his memoir with a provocative deictic: "It is part of the war waste" (17). Had he lived, that is, his friend would have continued producing sculpture on a par with the work that survived him and would have established himself beyond the promise noted by his friends. As it is, the scant monuments attesting to his greatness require an ambassador who knew the sculptor well:

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I have known many artists. I am not writing in a momentary fit of grief or of enthusiasm. I am not making phrases. I am not adding in any way to statements I had made and printed during Gaudier's lifetime. A great spirit has been among us, and a great artist is gone. Neither the man nor the artist had shown any traces of failure. Neither do I write in a spirit that is not common to those who had known him; to those who had known him even slightly. (17)

The first three sentences are declamatory, "constatation" of facts that enact themselves to whatever extent the tone of the piece allows the reader to believe in the judgment of the art critic. We may not understand the plates we see in the appendix, and we certainly hadn't guessed Gaudier's importance during his lifetime. But here is an author who has known "many artists" as well as "young men of promise," and who, as the chief publicist for the vorticist movement while it was occurring, remains uniquely qualified to explain its importance now that it has passed into memory. Here too are the plates themselves—nothing has been hidden from view, and readers can judge for themselves whether the critic has made too much of his subject.

Oddly, Pound concentrates our attention on what he is *not* doing: this is a cautious rational appraisal, not a "momentary fit of grief," a retrospect consisting of reproduced writing, not a revisionist reading or even anything new. But if Pound has not succeeded in reaching his reader the first time around in the periodicals, his motive in addressing them a second time, and the fact that his nondoings give way to Gaudier's nondoings nearly immediately, should indicate these are extrajournalistic tactics (more than "making phrases"). Gaudier did not "fail" in any way; he was stolen from the art world by mortar fire. The fact that the art world has not formed a consensus that this was one of the greatest injustices of the war, in combination with our continued underestimation of Gaudier's talent, has necessitated an argument from Pound disguised as reportage even though he detests other reporters and critics.

Pound's penchant for anaphora in this passage, as in the majority of his prose works and much of the *Cantos*, signals more than a breach of Edwardian decorum. Again and again he chooses declamatory repetition over sequential hypotaxis. By doing so, he remains consistent with his aesthetic calls for concision and avoids laying bare his rhetorical method.

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In this case, the more he can make his judgment of Gaudier's talent seem a statement of obvious fact, the more he can avoid seeming to argue. Any argument that does occur does so only *en passant*. Near the end of the book he answers the unasked question of why Gaudier should have been neglected by quoting one of his own articles on the state of the arts in the West:

Because neither America nor England cares enough to elevate great men to control; because there is no office for the propagation of form; because there is no power to set Epstein, for example, where he should be, to wit, in some place where his work would be so prominent that people . . . would be forced to think about form. Of course, some of them do think about form; and then, after they have constructed a fine shape, go *gaga* with ornaments. (101)

In the absence of any existing "power" to set such an artist "where he should be," when what is needed is the "propagation" of exemplary forms along with the wherewithal and guidance to understand and use those examples correctly, Pound will insert himself and his memoir into the vacuum to correct the oversight. But Pound assumes that Gaudier's neglect results from viewers' ignorance; people have not seen his works, and so they have not been "forced to think about form." This memoir will confront its readers with Gaudier's plates and thereby force them to think about them, but only after it contends with the surplus, superfluous memoirs and sculptures of lesser men currently glutting the market, who not only go "*gaga* with ornaments" and ought to be suppressed but are too numerous to allow appreciation of worthwhile but undertrumpeted art like Gaudier's.

Gaudier-Brzeska's arguments against outmoded frillery and ornamentation will be familiar to any reader of Pound's imagist manifestos or literary criticism. But I want to focus on the similarity between the photographic plates, appended for perusal without further elaboration, and Pound's earlier concept of the "luminous detail" from "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris" (1911). In this essay, he distinguishes luminous details from regular facts that are significant or symptomatic, but only in that they mean some particular thing to a particular person; they require someone to represent them sequentially, causally, and usually periodically before they mean anything evidentiary. The luminous detail, meanwhile, "give[s]

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one a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law" (*Prose* 22), and takes the onus of rhetorical contrivance away from its presenter:

So-and-so was, in such-and-such a year, elected Doge. So-and-so killed the tyrant. So-and-so was banished for embezzling State funds. So-and-so embezzled but was not banished. These statements may contain germs of drama, certain suggestions of human passion or habit, but they are reticent, they tell us nothing we did not know, nothing which enlightens us. They are of any time and any country. By reading them with the blanks filled in, with the names written in, we get no more intimate acquaintance with the temper of any period; but when in Burkhardt we come upon a passage: "In this year the Venetians declined to make war upon the Milanese because they held that any war between buyer and seller must prove profitable to neither," we come upon a portent, the old order changes, one conception of war and of the State begins to decline. The Middle Ages imperceptibly give ground to the Renaissance.⁴ (22)

The luminous detail is not necessarily something that one looks for because it can be used to persuade others; it is useful precisely because one doesn't have to do anything at all but place it, sparkling, in front of the reader, after which illumination must occur. To read history for the luminous detail is to stop reading it for pleasure (the "germs of drama") or to understand character (to read for typical "suggestions of human passion or habit"). Such pleasurable or psychological predilections are diversions for the historian out for the facts.

What emerges instead is a method by which the artist-assembler has sifted through documents and presented only those in which the "old order changes." Precision and economy combine with ambition and pedagogy, of a sort:

As for myself, I have tried to clear up a certain messy place in the history of literature; I have tried to make our sentiment of it more accurate. Accuracy of sentiment here will make more accurate the sentiment of the growth of literature as a whole, and of the Art of poetry. . . . The artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment. (23)

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Partly the artist does not comment because he doesn't need to: the detail contains within it enough information that no paratexts are necessary. Nor does he explicitly instruct, since the detail does all of the teaching. But the artist's prerogative certainly includes the inconspicuous assembly of these details and thus the decision about which lessons to teach. Since nowhere in Pound's passage does he reveal how we can tell when one of these details lights up—we only know that he has been illumined by a passage from Burkhardt—he has mystified not only his own activities and responsibilities in providing this archival research but also the process by which one becomes an artist in the first place. Both remain secreted and sacrosanct.

For Pound, one prerequisite for creating art (or understanding an artist) is a tendency to think in terms of historical, didactic monism and cultural totalities. The only time historical facts would "tell us nothing we did not know, nothing which enlightens us" would be when one has sufficient familiarity with the historical record and is reading a particular historian closely (and doubtless disagreeing often). Similarly, if facts appear "of any time and any country," then one has either taken them out of context or one believes that all cultures advance historically in the same way and therefore will bequeath identical truths to those who study the artifacts of multiple peoples. Pound provides this analogy to the initially confused reader of a sequence of multiply juxtaposed luminous details:

Let us suppose a man, ignorant of painting, taken into a room containing a picture by Fra Angelico, a picture by Rembrandt, one by Valesquez, Memling, Rafael, Monet, Beardsley, Hokusai, Whistler, and a fine example of the art of some forgotten Egyptian. He is told that this is painting and that every one of these is a master-work. He is, if a thoughtful man, filled with confusion. These things obey no common apparent law. (24)

We might as easily suppose a lay reader without a crib taken into an epic like the *Cantos* containing scenes with Confucius and Eleanor of Aquitaine and Odysseus and Sigismondo Malatesta and Baldy Bacon: he protests in frustrated confusion. But Pound's expectation, apparently, is that anyone possessed of a "thoughtful" reading praxis should assume that each detail could adequately stand in as synecdoche for an era or a culture (or both) and try to puzzle out the parataxis, to learn what the

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arranger of the paintings on the wall or the cantos in the sequence has meant the viewer to learn.

Michael North notes that the likelihood that the sample observer will prefer Rembrandt to Beardsley is as great as a preference for Beardsley to Rembrandt. There is no "common apparent law," since each of the art objects reflects only internal formal consistency and the cultural apparatuses that produced them, and since the examples serve as stand-ins for their respective cultures, an appraisal of their relative worth would be tantamount to valuing French painting more than Japanese or contemporary art more than the ancient artifacts of "some forgotten Egyptian" (140–41). But the room full of paintings (or the canto full of references) only confounds us if what we are after is depth and cultural understanding. If we limit ourselves to being taught a "common law" we should eventually learn it—especially for the much less haphazard detailing going on in the *Cantos*, which were assembled without comment but still (we assume) were assembled with some intention capable of being puzzled out.

Marjorie Perloff resolves this tension by declaring the *Cantos* a "cubist surface" that

occupies a middle space between the mimetic on the one hand and the non-objective or "abstract" on the other; the referential process is not cut off but it is subordinated to a concern for sequential or spatial arrangement. (182)

The compositional praxis of the poem is not simply an overlaying or concatenation of Kung with Eleanor, or (Perloff's example from Canto IX) "of alternating a love letter with a list of building materials, a list of building materials with a papal edict." The poem emphasizes such alternation over the things alternated; it forces the reader to intuit the relationship between juxtaposed pieces if sense is to be made out of the juxtaposition. The collage process demands that we participate in the game of piecing together a narrative, but that narrative describes the process of attempting to piece the fragments together more than it represents anything like historical continuity or progression. Perloff agrees with North that Pound's tactics undercut any historicity that the documented and well-sourced fragments might have had and goes a step further to suggest that we might take all "facts" in the *Cantos* as semifictionalized.

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Each detail exists in the poem only for what the central consciousness of the assembler demands it to mean, in a relational value retaining the authenticity of source material but ceasing to point outward and illuminate anything except the poem that the details constitute. The *Cantos* may include history, in other words, but they are not devoted to its systematic elaboration and interpretation.

Pound's hope seems to be that even if all of the luminous facts at first appear disjointed and deictic, floating signifiers abstracted from their referents, the Burkhardtean truth of each will ultimately emerge as immutable—or at least that his readers will regard it as such. The game of piecing together the intention behind the parataxis presupposes that we will accept the luminous details as self-evident and self-contained entities rather than sequential units in a contingent chain of argumentation. Insofar as Pound purports to serve only as "an assembler of others' thought," John Whittier-Ferguson is quite correct in locating the poet's collocations as a "site where modernism actively disavows agency" (118). But as a rhetorical gesture, the exclusion of all save these constated fragments still attempts a persuasion of sorts, defining a reader who can do nothing but arrive at the conclusion orchestrated by Pound. As Hugh Kenner has noted, the elimination of most verbs in the *Cantos* and imagist poetry accommodates "a taste for the programmed rather than the fortuitous, taking its pleasure in planned, not improvised, effects," but this poetic economics of hermeneutic scarcity forces a single outcome: each segment (or image) of the ideogram ideally "rhymes" in but one particular way with the others, until only one meaning is possible ("Simplicities" 21–23). What else can one do with "In a Station of the Metro" but ask how "the apparition of these faces in a crowd" is like "petals on a wet, black bough" and then puzzle out what that's got to do with the Paris Metro?

Pound, in a retrospect included in *Gaudier-Brzeska*, details the origins of this technique in a haiku he gleaned second-hand from a Japanese naval officer: "The foot-steps of the cat upon the snow: / (are like) plum-blossoms." The words 'are like' would not have appeared in the original, but I add them for clarity" (89). Considering what the reader must perform between the two lines of his own "In a Station of the Metro," he continues:

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I dare say it is meaningless unless one has drifted into a certain vein of thought. In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.

We must drift, then, "into a certain vein of thought," or the poem remains without meaning. Only if we agree to this bargain (however provisionally) do we mentally perform the "transforming" and "darting" required to make these few sparse words a poem and provide them with a hermeneutic context within which to radiate.⁵

Since the imagist poem requires merely a "precise instant" of its reader and merely attempts to depict, it may appear innocent enough. But although Pound in *Gaudier-Brzeska* avers "the image is not an idea," he continues: "it is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" (92). The vortex as a "radiant node" is not too far from the "luminous detail," and insofar as we are asked to replicate someone else's thought process while at the same time being forced to submit to that thought process in order just to read the poem, we should regard both species of fragments as much more insinuating and sinister.⁶ The only way we could find a succession of images or luminous details persuasive, then, is if we were willing to participate in the poem and thereby replicate the assembler's thought processes in the first place. Even if, after piecing together the the proffered deixis and thereby "drifting" into the author's conclusions, we reject it wholesale because of the assumptions on which those conclusions have been based, we still for a moment share them in the process of reading.⁷ Though indirect and entirely subtle, I think we have to regard this (however fleeting) suasion as an intentional rhetorical device.

What may not be clear at this point is why Pound should have objected so strenuously to linear, syllogistic, rhetorical methods. He clearly took all steps possible to protect his poetry from any semblance of rhetoric, to the point where many of his critics simply note his distrust in passing. But I want to show how Pound uses the term *rhetoric* as a near-synonym for deceit, and that after the Great War his pejorative denunciations must also be read as laden with disgust for Liberal rationalism. Pound came to associate the pentametric line, the periodic sentence, and the conventional rhyme scheme with the specious justifications of the Liberal government

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for its Allied interventions and wartime economic conduct. By eschewing anything resembling it (deploying instead a triply stressed line borrowed from Arnaut Daniel's Provençal poetry), he hoped to approach something like prosodic sincerity in his poetry.⁸

Pound's modernist stance, of course, predated the war in the forms of his antibourgeois personal affectations and his substitution of ancient rhythms and cadences for the iambic pentameter he associated with Victorian poetic convention. The declarations for the imagist school he collects in *Gaudier-Brzeska* all tend to stress the ingenuousness of the poem and the structural impossibility that his school's practices were some form of hoodwinking: "The 'image' is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being" (83). In this case, the "furthest possible remove" of imagism turns out to be a dressed-down affair, denuded of descriptive tropes and conventions: "One is tired of ornamentations, they are all a trick, and any sharp person can learn them" (88). Hence the need to ward one's readers from accepting too readily the arguments of "any sharp person":

When I find people ridiculing the new arts, or making fun of the clumsy odd terms that we use in trying to talk of them amongst ourselves; when they laugh at our talking about the "ice-block quality" in Picasso, I think it is only because they do not know what thought is like, and that they are familiar only with argument and gibe and opinion. That is to say, they can only enjoy what they have been brought up to consider enjoyable, or what some essayist has talked about in mellifluous phrases. (87)

Here Pound prefers "the clumsy odd terms" that may be nonce and unfamiliar and difficult but nevertheless constitute precise appraisal of things rather than the "mellifluous phrases" of the rhetorical "essayist" who by "argument and gibe and opinion" has lulled the gullible and unsuspecting reader into believing in his critical authority. Pound also prefers that reader who takes note of his excoriation of such easily swayed ridiculers and instead attempts to find joy in that which is not readily found to be enjoyable, despite the effort required to find out why he should be joyful. Such a reader, in recognition of Pound's controlled and authentic (if ugly and unwieldy) diction, would consider precision its own justification for

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the authority exercised in a phrase like "I think it is only because they do not know what thought is like" or necessary to summarily declare an entire critical school *déclassé* or wrong-headed.⁹

Pound's castigations of critical philistinism thus select a certain type of reader, one who will prefer minimalist prose to its overblown alternative and can be trained, by the time the war has started, to tie rhetorical malfeasance to the decline of states, should the authority behind the prose direct her or him to be ready to do so. In a January 1915 number of A. R. Orage's *New Age*, Pound juxtaposes a paragraph on Machiavelli's "prose realism" with the following postmortem on the first Italian risorgimento:

And in the midst of these awakenings Italy went to rot, destroyed by rhetoric, destroyed by the periodic sentence and by the flowing paragraph, as the Roman Empire had been destroyed before her. For when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish. Rome went because it was no longer the fashion to hit the nail on the head. They desired orators.
(*Gaudier* 113–14)

Though we may desire a few more causal steps between "the periodic sentence and . . . the flowing paragraph" and "empires wane and diminish," Pound's argument sounds the familiar diagnosis of decadence as a species of excess. The recurring preference for orators to anyone wishing "to hit the nail on the head" has allowed a substitution of fashions in which rhetorical excess breeds indirection, inactivity, and, eventually, calculated deceit indistinguishable from otherwise well-intentioned oratory.

This mania for economy and precision over excess and vague bombast may add another layer to Pound's perplexingly vehement animus against symbolism. Scott Hamilton and James Longenbach have each contributed valuable studies of Pound's early, only fitfully successful attempts to suppress the legacy of symbolism in his own poetic, whether by failing to acknowledge how symbolist techniques influenced his ideogramic method or by working, with Yeats, to rarify his own technique and exorcise the poetic ghosts of the decadent nineties.¹⁰ Here I am more interested in the historical tenors Pound associated with symbolism. To the extent that symbolist poetics still held sway in Edwardian poetry, Pound associated it with the hegemonic, casuist rhetorical practice of Liberal England, even though Arthur Symons had outlined it in 1899 as "an attempt to spiri-

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tualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority" (9).¹¹ Pound's argument against symbolist rhetoric was not against its spirituality but against its complacency in wielding the tools of Liberal rationalization and thus its complicity in the government's profound deceit. For he believed the symbolists had lost control over their figures, preferring the vague and suggestive and profuse over the precise and concise. In their excess they invited the same corruption he saw in political rhetoric into their poetry:

To hold a like belief in a sort of permanent metaphor is, as I understand it, "symbolism" in its profounder sense. It is not necessarily a belief in a permanent world, but it is a belief in that direction.

Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in "association," that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy. One can be grossly "symbolic," for example, by using the term "cross" to mean trial. The symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7. The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs *a*, *b*, and *x* in algebra.

Moreover, one does not wish to be called a symbolist, because symbolism has usually been associated with mushy technique. (Gaudier 84–85)

Three reasons are given here for imagism's divergence from the decadent nineties: symbolism is spiritualism ("a belief in [the] direction" of "a permanent world"); symbolism as currently practiced uses the symbol as cliché (a tired vehicle tied by convention to a single tenor); and having "usually been associated with mushy technique," symbolism is simply bad art by the precise standards Pound has been espousing on behalf of imagism. More importantly, the means by which the symbolists fix their symbols into constants instead of the more preferable, situationally dependent metaphors is through collaboration with conventional cultural usage. Whereas imagism works to rivet each metaphoric vehicle onto only one tenor, and to stamp its use of that trope with the aura of a nonce coinage, the symbolist poem welcomes and indeed relies on its reader's cultural memory of symbolic tenors, reveling in its connection to poetic tradition even as it expands the purview of poetic content. Compare, for example,

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Pound's rather dismal assessment of symbolism to Yeats's exuberant 1900 testament of what happens when one reads a symbolist poem:

All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion ... the more various and numerous the elements that have flowed into its perfection, the more powerful will be the emotion, the power, the god it calls among us. ("Symbolism" 156-57)

Yeats's symbol reads much like one of Pound's fluxional vortices, except that Yeats's flux is a suffusion of "all sounds, all colours, all forms" into the word, which acts as a vessel for any association the reader might bring to the table. Yeats protests that even though the "powers" summed up in these words may be "disembodied" and "indefinable," they are at the same time "precise," "certain," and "distinct": the symbol conveys certitude that its effects are various and discrete, even though its mystical qualities ensure that dissecting those effects would murder the "god" they beckon. If Pound might cringe at the mellifluous phrase "whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions," Yeats's describing the harmony of those emotions as a "musical relation" anticipates (in diction) the third imagist tenet: "As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome" (*Gaudier* 83).

Far from the one-to-one metonymic correspondence we find in Pound's allegation, Yeats's symbol is a metaphoric vehicle with an indeterminate, potentially immense number of tenors, and his poems invite readers to imbue their symbols with the "preordained energies" of "long association" without specifying that those associations need be limited or even pertinent. While imagist poems privilege *phanopoeia* (words that "evoke or define visual phenomena") and *melopoeia* (words that "register or suggest auditory phenomena"), the symbolist poem enlists *logopoeia*, that part of poetry dependent on semiotic play and linguistic convention (*Prose* 321). As Richard Sieburth suggests, the idea of *logopoeia* is anathema to Pound,¹² whose entire imagist project "proposes both to check the

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tropological movement of language (the catachrestic "habit of defining things always 'in terms of something else'" [Gaudier 81]) and to arrest the temporality of writing and reading within an epiphanic "instant of time" (150).¹³

Yeats's symbol, like Pound's image, purports to last only a moment, but it makes its claim for instantaneity through lyric technique (form, and therefore *logopoeic* convention) rather than through brevity and concision. As Clive Scott notes, the symbolist poem creates a reader who will simultaneously, and rather passively, take in the aural delights of the meter and the visual effects of the form, never paying complete attention to either, and who will expect a sense of the eternal to infuse the poem's words (207).¹⁴ Symbolism thus aims to train readers in a way nearly opposite to imagism. Whereas Pound wants focus on particulars and extreme alertness from his audience, Yeats desires *séance*-like absorption and misty credulity (the kind necessary to feel the "footsteps over our hearts we call emotions"). Whereas imagism attunes readers to recognize rapid shifts in cadence and spatial structure, symbolism regularizes its meters and relies on metronomic repetition for its hypnotic qualities.

While Arthur Symons may have declared symbolism a movement against rhetoric, it opposed itself only to the rhetoric that was coldly scientific, materialist, agnostic, empirical, and unbeautiful. Pound's polemical differentiation between the two schools lists as the symbolists' first offense not their "mushy," excessive, unnecessary, or imprecise tendencies, but that they make their symbols "have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2, and 7." The image, meanwhile, has a "variable significance," like "the signs a, b, and x in algebra." The allegation of "mushy technique" derides the symbolist poet's abdication of the hard, objective work of reigning in meaning¹⁵ just as it signals Pound's desire to dominate and assign meaning to his own poems. The symbolist reader is invited to add an indeterminate (and, if we believe Yeats, possibly infinite) number of new tenors for each metaphor; the imagist reader is trained and indeed constrained to look for that one particular function of the image collage that the assembling consciousness has mandated by fiat.

Pound's reduction of symbolist poetics to simplistic mathematics perhaps signals his contempt for the symbolists' *logopoeic* nonchalance, but it certainly demonstrates his urgent desire to avoid any possibility of poetic irresponsibility or complicity. For Pound, the authority first of all to drive out soft, mushy, imprecise terminology and second to dictate

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exactly how the reader must take the terms proffered is a necessity for a poet, however illusory the control of an author over the ambiguity of his diction might prove. The minimally expressed image, like the atomistic luminous detail that preceded it, attempts to constrain poetic hermeneutics by reining in the permutations of the sign/signified couple. Without the stamp of authority assigning value, images would devolve into symbols and the reader could freely determine their meaning, for good or ill. And without the precision and concision characteristic of Pound's poetry, the poem could begin to carry more connotations than the poet intended and could conceivably become culpable in exposing its reader to rhetorical excesses the author would prefer not to commit.

The rhetoric of imagism, then, can be described as an attempt to invest the poetic voice of its personae with vaunted authority while displacing the site of authority onto a succession of subjective perspectives. In the clipped language of "In a Station of the Metro" or the Japanese haiku Pound describes in *Gaudier-Brzeska*, the minimalist presentation of a scattering of details ensures concentration on a handful of nouns: "apparition," "petals," and "bough," or "footsteps," "cat," and "plum-blossoms." The concatenation of these details with the manifest instantaneity of the lyric utterance serves to illuminate the privileged perspective of the speaker, whose dismayed shock in the Metro or whose curious backward glance we briefly inhabit. True, we may wonder how exactly to construe the intended inflection of the presented sensoria (for "In a Station of the Metro," we might probe "apparition" and wonder exactly which phanopoeic imagery that term ought to conjure, or similarly wonder which type of tree provides the bough and petals). But we nevertheless accept the implicit double rhetoric of the poem: that the speaker's perspective is worth intuiting, and that such an image is a fit subject for poetry. As I will show next, though Pound's persuasive goals shift during the composition of the middle cantos and his 1930s prose works, his strategic use of implicit rhetoric to exert authority over his readers never falters.

§

After 1931, Pound devoted himself to economic study and full-throated partisanship for Mussolini's Italy, and as Leon Surette and Robert Casillo have demonstrated, his engagement with C. H. Douglas's Social Credit movement, Gesell's ideas of self-destructing currency (stamp-scrip), and

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Italian fascism become infused with an anti-Semitism of a different order from that which he evinced in his earlier poetry and prose.¹⁶ On the other hand, as Tim Redman and Lawrence Rainey have noted, Pound's interest in Social Credit dates back to his work with Orage's *New Age* in the 1910s, and his flirtation with fascism to his archival work on Sigismondo Malatesta in the early 1920s.¹⁷ Even as his economic interests grow ever more diverse and intense in their explorations, Pound's rhetoric remains consistently unconventional in its attempts to distance his aesthetic, economic, and political practice from that of the hegemonic writings of liberal and communist apologists in the interwar period. My task here is to examine his curious rhetorical strategies to distinguish between what remains constant in his thought and what changes drastically once he decamps for Rapallo.

Symptomatic diagnoses as well as historical studies of Pound's characteristic writings about economics, politics, and aesthetics all note an ethical dimension to his thought that betrays an outdated rationalism in his presuppositions about political economy. But I am not convinced that we need to trace a particular flaw in his thinking, tempting as the effort may be to absolve certain portions of his poetic career from the taint of virulent anti-Semitism. The language that Pound uses in his 1930s prose, for example, is that of a committed aesthetic partisan rather than a gullible or half-witted amateur, and the shift in tactics between the immediate aftermath of the First World War and the buildup to the Second can be explained, at least in terms of rhetoric, by his subsuming all of his concerns under the umbrella rubric of *fede fascista*, his fascist faith in the warrior artist Benito Mussolini.

His first major foray into assessing war guilt, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), has been typified by both Pound and his critics as a farewell to his former professional aloofness from world affairs.¹⁸ The aesthete Mauberley is criticized for his ignorance of the way the world works, his powerlessness to combat the cynical actors the poem blames for the war, and his unpreparedness to speak as a poet to the political climate of the war's aftermath. In contrast to his speaker, by the time of the poem's publication Pound had established a public persona of artistic and critical authority mixed with avant-garde iconoclasm and disdain for all but his own brand of didacticism. His work in *Gaudier-Brzeska* had attempted to tie the too-early demise of imagism, vorticism, and *Blast* to "the war waste," but that was a very different task in early 1916, when the enormity

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of that waste had yet to be finally tallied. By 1920, the Great War having been concluded, the age demanded public memorials for a lost generation:

Some quick to arm,
 some for adventure,
 some from fear of weakness,
 some from fear of censure,
 some for fear of slaughter, in imagination,
 learning later . . . (*Poems* 63; Pound's ellipsis)

The Battle of the Somme, whose name and anaphoric emphasis would loom in front of the postwar reader of these lines, signified the soldiers killed there—60,000 just in the first day of the offensive.¹⁹ The lines require the reader to impute some well-known referent to the ellipsis, but the act of trailing off belongs more to the monologist Mauberley's horror concerning the war than to any hesitancy on Pound's part, since the poem continues by enumerating specific deeds so that the reader might not misattribute blame. Even so, the perfidious agents are left sinisterly unnamed and unapprehended (they are only "old men," still at large). Probably a complex host of causes led to the gigantic calamity of the Somme, but the poem hopes its political explanation (the villainous old men) will seem more trustworthy in its singularity once matched with the multitude of evil ranged against it. In the same way, the myriad soldiers who fought at the Somme may have harbored many personal reasons for fighting, but they all met the same ill fate:

Died some, pro patria,
 non "dulce" non "et décor" . . .
 walked eye-deep in hell
 believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
 came home, came home to a lie,
 home to many deceits,
 home to old lies and new infamy;
 usury age-old and age-thick
 and liars in public places. (64)

The way to get soldiers to walk "eye-deep in hell" is to conceal from them where and why they're marching. Such deceit precludes the possibility of personal honor in an overall dishonorable conflict; "non 'dulce

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non 'et décor' . . . " trails off wearily, as though the argument should have been very familiar already. But as the poem would have it, worse than that is what happened at "home," a word that, repeated four times in three lines and rhyming with "some," begs our attention. As Michael North has noted about the *Usura* canto (XLV), Pound's preference for anaphora, alone among the classical rhetorical tropes, produces a concatenation that could last as easily for ten lines as a thousand (151); in this case, the litany of rhetorical misdeeds seems remarkably restrained in comparison with the later cantos.²⁰

But Mauberley is no rhetorician, and here the anaphora is meant to perform the work of conflating the vague political origins of the conflict with the well-known military results of the Somme. In the same way that some would seek "adventure" to avoid the "censure" of their compatriots, whipped into a jingoistic frenzy by the rhetoricians, the poem seeks to redirect blame for the disaster from the command staff of Douglas Haig's British Expeditionary Force to those at home, whom the poem sees as complicit in starting and prolonging the war in order to fuel their economic interests. Furthermore, Mauberley's status as a hoodwinked, home-front, noncombatant observer in no way detracts from the poem's denunciation of the hoodwinking purveyors of European rhetoric. Their persuasive power is matched with their audience's gullibility, for the contemporary English reader of *Mauberley* is part of a culpable electorate that does not include those soldiers returning home "unbelieving" of what has been done at home while they were away.

The Great War, that "gigantic stupidity," the "accumulated asininity of that race which 'N'a jamais pu qu'organiser sa barbarie,' and the vanity of an epileptic" (*Gaudier* 53) had certainly turned Pound against Liberal parliamentarianism in general. And though we may agree with his assessment that "Gents who make guns like to sell 'em," (*Jefferson* 72) and that banks loan them money since the "gents" are likely to turn a profit, the contradictory advice that Pound begins dispensing in the years following the war often leads readers to wonder what he requires of them. Certainly he demands that we trust his authority, which for the *Cantos* involves submitting to what Lawrence Rainey calls "faith without content" (88), to believe in both the worthiness of the figures the poem admires (Odysseus, Kung, Eleanor, Baldy Bacon, Malatesta, Lenin, Mussolini, etc.) and their eventual coherence as a set. Rainey's study of the Malatesta cantos demonstrates Pound's eagerness to lay bare the experience embedded in the

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luminous details of his sources, to replicate both the obedient admiration Malatesta's soldiers bore for him and his own joy at discovering the historical figure, in whose likeness he was beginning to view Mussolini (103).

Since Pound has primed us to be wary of the persuasive act as such, the faith he demands of his readers, both to believe he will eventually finish composing the *Cantos* and has chosen fit subjects for the poem, is designed after the *Draft of XVI Cantos* to exclude more and more of his contemporaries from the persuasive conduit.²¹ Once the litany of virtuous figures includes Mussolini, the man of action who would stand up for art and culture even as he swept away the "sloppy and ambiguous language" of the "wangers and pettifoggers" (*Jefferson* 77), and who would right the ship of state through brute force, the middle cantos become less an exploration of virtuous statecraft than a host of reasons to support Italian fascism.²² But this support hinges on a suspension of critical scrutiny ("Any thorough judgment of MUSSOLINI will be in a measure an act of faith, it will depend on what you *believe* the man means, what you believe that he wants to accomplish" [*Jefferson* 33]), and unless Pound's writings have succeeded in imbuing his readers with partisanship (or submission), the middle cantos are a long slog indeed.

Eventually Pound becomes disillusioned with political diplomacy to those not already possessing the *fede fascista*, although his frustrations are always couched as if Liberal deceit had forever poisoned the atmosphere for such diplomacy. As Michael Thurston and Tim Redman have shown, Pound began an earnest dialogue with communist poets in the early 1930s in the pages of the *New Masses*, only to be swiftly discouraged by what he considered their intransigence.²³ In *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* he declares, as if the refutation of persuasion should prove persuasive,

I am not putting these sentences in monolinear syllogistic arrangement, and I have no intention of using the old form of trickery to fool the reader, any reader, into thinking I have proved anything, or that having read a paragraph of my writing he KNOWS something that he can only *know* by examining a dozen or two dozen facts and putting them all together. (28)

Pound is still not "making phrases" in 1935. Syllogism, after the Great War, has become the "old form of trickery," because any link in the logical chain might resemble in its suspect rhetorical appeal the sophistic lies told to the public to justify the British Army's entry into the war. Rhetoric

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provides villains and heroes alike the same strategies for appealing to the emotions of their audiences, overwhelming the listener's capacity to attend to the logic of the proposition. Pound proffers something else, a paratactical listing of facts in which nothing necessarily means anything to the reader unless he or she sees (and only thereafter "*knows*") the same connections the writer has already seen.

The problem, as Pound was beginning to suspect, was that if his reader does not share the author's assumptions, or does not typographically prefer italics to all caps, this particular kind of persuasive endeavor falls flat. No matter how simply the subject is put forward, no matter how judicious the quality or enormous the quantity of facts marshaled, or how loudly the speaker shouts,

There is probably no language simple enough and clear enough to explain this, to make this clear to the American extreme left and to the American liberal. I mean to say that the left is completely, I mean completely, absolutely, utterly, and possibly incurably, ignorant of Jefferson and nearly ignorant of the structure of the American government, both *de jure* and *de facto*.

They understand nothing of this subject because they have no desire to understand it, and practically all political parties are swallowed up in the desire for mutual ignorance of their reciprocal difference. (*Jefferson* 11–12)

To explain why Mussolini's popularity in the United States has waned, Pound asserts that the American Left has not yet studied American history, after which they would irresistibly connect Jefferson and Mussolini and convert to fascism (or be criminally negligent for their failure to do so); indeed, they have *kept* themselves from studying history for such truths, through some pernicious "desire" not to know. If political parties are universally "swallowed up in the desire for mutual ignorance," there is not much chance they will attend to fact and thus dispel their ignorance. Hence the *Guide to Kulchur* (1937) testifies to Pound's growing reluctance to blame only the speaker in a rhetorical situation for trickery and deceit: "We err in supposing that insincerity is peculiar to the man speaking. In nine cases out of ten we find an insincerity of the auditor, of the man who does NOT want to hear" (128). Since he regarded himself as having exhausted all means of intervening in the speaker-auditor conduit, we should understand Pound's commitment to fascism as a program of

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action meant to circumvent the argumentative sphere, filled with villain and nonpersuadable nonlisteners: "cut the cackle, if a man is a mere s.o.b. don't argue" (Jefferson 70).²⁴

Pound also offers a structural critique of "the American government both *de jure* and *de facto*"—of what he saw as the danger of a political system that allows overly free expression of rhetorical utterances. Rhetoric becomes another in a series of reasons why fascist authority ought to rule unfettered by a concern for individual rights:

The real life in regular verse is an irregular movement under-lying Jefferson thought the formal features of the American system would work, and they did work till the time of General Grant but the condition of their working was that inside them there should be a *de facto* government composed of sincere men willing the national good. When the men of understanding are too lazy to impart the results of their understanding, and when the nucleus of the national mind hasn't the moral force to translate knowledge into action I don't believe it matters a damn what legal forms there are in a government. The nation will get the staggers. (Jefferson 94–95)

Increasingly, Pound views the "*de jure*" government as irrelevant figure-heads fronting for the "*de facto*" dealings of the usurers.

But he parses his political protests in ethical language: there is a "moral" prerogative "to translate knowledge into action" as surely as one ought to eschew the rhetoric of the "usuriocrats" and speak with all possible precision. Since "the real life in regular verse is an irregular movement under-lying," the *de jure* / *de facto* distinction is also an aesthetic one reminiscent of his earlier diatribes against symbolism. The rhythm, structure, and rhyme scheme of a symbolist's poem (*de jure* insofar as they underlie the diction and detract from the text's *de facto* content) are vaguely rhetorical, dishonest, and imprecise. In the same way, "demo-liberal" rhetoric hides from public notice the pernicious control (the "machinery . . . social flummydiddle, etiquette, precedence, etc." [69–70]) of the banks over the state, which consequently "get[s] the staggers."

By the time he writes his *Guide to Kulchur* in the late 1930s, in other words, he has ceased to argue against argument and subsumed all of his political, economic, and aesthetic thinking under ethical rubrics, which his team alone can define. While he retains his grandiose respect for and

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claim to written authority, his early confidence that his writings might reach and influence those who control policy or, failing that, persuade the "men of understanding" to "translate knowledge into action" by rising up and replacing them, has substantially lessened. The *Guide* is thus devoted to hypothetical readers willing to listen to Pound rant haphazardly, never knowing whether they deserve berating or are among those he favors.

The book is a running dare Pound has enacted on himself to write a "totalitarian treatise" (27) without consulting anything except his own memory.²⁵ The title's "Kulchur" is a derivative of the German *Kultur*, which Pound associates with a pedantic, fetishistic penchant for detail. And as Catherine Paul has recently argued, the subordination of all fact and detail to the filter of Pound's mind coincides with the declaration of the Italian empire after the subjugation of Ethiopia. Pound's focus in the *Guide* is certainly imperialist in its subordination of African otherness and emphasis on the example of Leo Frobenius, an anthropologist Pound admired for his "totalitarian" theory of the *paideuma*, a neatly reductive method of inferring a non-European culture's coherence from its position relative to European ones. But insofar as the *paideuma* has replaced the luminous detail, the *Guide* has consequences for his poetic and rhetorical practice. Early in the *Guide* Pound returns to the scenario he first envisioned in "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris," that of a patron in an art gallery:

May I suggest (not to prove anything, but perhaps to open the reader's thought) that I have a certain real knowledge which wd. enable me to tell a Goya from a Valasquez from an Ambrogio Praedis, a Praedis from an Ingres or a Moreau

and that this differs from the knowledge you or I wd. have if I went into the room back of the next one, copied a list of names and maxims from good Fiorentino's *History of Philosophy* and committed the names, maxims, and possibly dates to my memory.

It may or may not matter that the first knowledge is direct, it remains effortlessly as residuum, as part of my total disposition, it affects even perception of form-colour phenomenon subsequent to its acquisition. (28)

The 1911 art patron wondering about the lack of a "common apparent law" either has ceased to interest Pound or has since become possessed of a "certain real knowledge" that trumps the synecdochic relation of

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luminous details to the cultures they represent. Here the action performed on the viewer (or reader) by the paintings (or details) when he puzzles through their differences and is thus changed into someone able to distinguish between them is much more important than the “names, maxims, and possibly dates” he might have gleaned from looking them up in a Baedeker. It was important for Pound’s speaking pose here to have listed these particular artists to impress us but not factually important enough for him to have checked his sources. Accordingly, we have a hint of how we should read the *Guide* ourselves: attentive not so much to the details as to the sense of authority on all things they have created in Pound’s voice.²⁶

The voice bluntly propounds what it expects we will take for truths. Even as late as *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* Pound was at times willing to consider that he may have been speaking to a dissenting audience. In the *Guide* he feels justified in strewing non sequiturs regarding his pet subjects along and over the reader’s path.²⁷ If at any point we balk, we will only get more of the same:

For the 300th time I repeat that it is quite useless telling these things to people who do NOT want to hear them. The Lancashireman from S. America said yesterday, “the men in my club, there’ll be seven about a table and six will get up and go away, and I ask the seventh: why? And he says: They don’t like your ideas.”

The “ideas” of these returning Britons are more often mere facts, detached observations, with no theoretic bias. (228)

Pound had always insisted that he presented only “mere” fact, only the thing itself without “theoretic bias” or comment, and that to resist his innocent and humble presentations is to display the same loathsome prejudices as the men in the Lancashireman’s club. But since he expects this anecdote to remind his readers to stay open-minded and open-eared to his rants, we should wonder why we ought to agree with him.

As John Whittier-Ferguson observes, this passage

flies wide of an audience. Those who cultivate deafness will miss the 300th reprimand just as surely as they missed the first and the 299th; those who hear have been forced to sit through 299 inappropriate repetitions. The only person to whom the admonition can sensibly refer is Pound. (147)

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After such repetition, the gallery viewer or reader of imagist poetry to whom Pound has consistently addressed himself in his prose begins to resemble no one more strongly than himself, whom he has, after all, never had much trouble convincing. And if Pound is a man talking to himself, it can only be with the intent of convincing himself that his endless prose treatises have not been in vain, because *he* at least remembers them from their long composition processes. The *Guide*, while documenting Pound's memories and obsessions, professes nonchalance about whether or not we accept his authority, or even whether the raconteur writing the treatise can "Kulchur" us into agreement with him without having to ask for that agreement rhetorically.

But Pound's uneasy synthesis of his early concerns and his late, fascist-committed poetics requires him to refashion his earlier luminous detail as if it were consistent with the *paideuma*, in the same way he hoped to recontextualize the earlier cantos by appending *Eleven New Cantos* (1934) and the *Fifth Decad of Cantos* (1937) to the *Draft of XXX Cantos* (1930). Frobenius joins the already-long list of prose heroes that rivals the pantheon set up in the *Cantos* (A. R. Orage, Henry James, Gaudier-Brzeska, Remy de Gourmont, T. S. Eliot, C. H. Douglas, Silvio Gesell, and of course Mussolini), and his addition revises and subsumes the theories of his predecessors. Frobenius becomes the autodidactic exemplar the *Guide* proffers for its readers, whose ideas "are intended to 'go into action,' or to guide action and serve as rules (and/or measures) of conduct" (34). Frobenius's "paideuma," which Pound glosses as "the active element in the era, the complex of ideas which is in a given time germinal" (*Prose* 284), reminds us again to focus not on the excess or "decadence" of mere technique but on the "totality of the whole. The total significance of the whole" (*Guide* 89–90). Under the influence of a totalitarian paideuma, luminous details radiate only when they "go into action," which is to say, when a partisan has construed them by the party line.

If that sounds like syllogistic argumentation (one detail connected to the next), Pound quickly demurs: "I am not resurrecting a pragmatic sanction, but trying to light up pragmatic PROOF. The thread going through the holes in the coin . . . is a necessary part of a thought system" (188). But the *Guide*'s suppressed rhetorical praxis and erratic parataxis make the next luminous detail or unsupported allegation or *polumetis*

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hero impossible to predict, and the occluded but derivable hermeneutic context of the early cantos has been replaced by declarations rather than demonstrations of genius. As the Second World War approaches, Pound proves increasingly willing to consider the "thread going through the holes in a coin" of equal or greater importance than the luminous details the thread connects, although his growing impatience with independent-minded skeptics leads him to abjure trying to explain himself to the reader who wishes to scrutinize the connection between his large claims and his evidence. To Pound, this should be beyond dispute, since he has collapsed his evidentiary explorations with a monist hermeneutic exclusiveness: his opinions are true because they *must* be true, and the author does not comment to those villains who disagree.

In the sense that he continued performing the manifestations of his early practice of assembling pared-down luminous details, expecting the marks of genius to radiate of their own accord, Pound continued in the 1930s to believe what he set forth in "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris" (1911):

the man who really does the thing well, if he be pleased afterwards to talk about it, gets always his auditors' attention; he gets his audience the moment he says something so intimate that it proves him an expert: he does not, as a rule, sling generalities; he gives the particular case for what it is worth; the truth is the individual. (Prose 32)

Pound's career involved a search for a succession of *polumetis* figures and their incorporation into a long poem that would provide truth by providing the "intimacy" of the "individual." But what began as commitments to particularity, concision, and the thing done well, over the course of time, became markers of his fascist partisanship. Instead of supplying the means by which a reader of the *Guide* might infer the genius of Frobenius, Pound insults anyone unwilling to take his word about that genius, just as his equation of Jefferson with Mussolini requires absolute belief in the voice stripping away all but the (very few) similar characteristics between them. An ethos of particularity has given way to a totalitarian ethic of action, force, and empire.

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Notes

1. Tim Redman describes Mussolini's tailoring of regional speeches to the expectations of his listeners:

Many scholars today would agree with Pound that fascism, far from being monolithic, must be approached on a regional basis, because its practice varied in the various regions. *Il Duce's* varying speeches represented his understanding of Italian politics and, like many of the "theoretical" documents about fascism written by Mussolini and others, were fitted to the situation at hand. To Pound, Mussolini's inconsistency represented good rhetoric. (105)

2. Redman notes that Pound first compares Jefferson and Mussolini to an Italian audience in the March 1931 number of *Belvidere*, in an interview with Francesco Monotti (76).

3. Even after Mussolini's overthrow and Italy's defeat, Pound describes himself as having conducted a 30 years' hunt to assign blame for the Great War: "1918 began investigation of causes of war, to oppose same" (*Poems* viii).

4. Since this passage reads like a prolegomena or plot summary of many of the *Cantos*, Pound's early description of luminous detail can also inform a structural reading of the entire epic, and with little modification also describes the "ideogramic" and "paideuma" methods that succeed it.

5. Michael Thurston also reads this initial sleight-of-hand as a chance to intuit the machinations of the persona behind the poem:

The place of historical documents at the heart of Pound's project requires us to read *The Cantos* in a manner [Jerome] McGann calls "radial." We must, in other words, keep in simultaneous view both the text at hand and the ancillary texts on which it depends. Reaching out from a crucial quotation in the poem to grasp the whole it synecdochally represents, we can resist "that spell of self-transparency which hovers over all the texts we read." Pulling aside the text's generic curtain, disregarding admonitions to pay no attention to the man energetically working machinery behind it, we begin to see how Pound shapes his sources to fit his purposes—poetic and political. (137–38)

6. Especially since, by our participation in reading the poem, we become a part of that vortex. We would then be the vessel "from which, and through which, and into which" the ideas whirl; we're left with one-third of our agency (the "from which") and but a sieve's capacity for keeping out unwanted rushing ideas.

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7. Even if, in other words, we agree with none of Pound's assumptions, the poem assumes that we wholeheartedly concur, and furthermore demands that we do so for the duration of our reading; in this way the process of becoming a reader willing to take on faith all of Pound's assertions and associations is a prerequisite for reading the *Cantos*. I take it that this brief but inescapable concord between poem and reader accounts for the horror that nearly every Pound critic and reader expresses when emerging from and then describing the middle cantos: what else can we do but resent, after the fact, the paranoia and anti-Semitism we have been forced to intuit? Indeed, we may be motivated by feelings of complicity and self-disgust.

8. Critics of Pound tend to approve of his mistrust of iambic pentameter (as he puts it in Canto LXXXI, "to break the pentameter, that was the first heaven" [538]), without interrogating the motives behind that mistrust. Charles Altieri writes:

In Pound's formative years, his basic . . . struggle was to explore the consequences of basing lyric language on Provençal cadence rather than on the iambic discipline of the sonnet tradition. He also of course distrusted all forms of what he called rhetoric, but the iambic structure was for him the point at which the spirit of rhetoric took control over the poet's lyric ambitions. (249n4)

Peter Nicholls proves more helpful, in that he interprets Pound's mistrust of rhetoric:

Almost from the first, Pound's writing had been conceived as a device of liberation, as an assertion of those imaginative and affective impulses which a materialist society seeks to curtail. This was one reason for his early interest in the Provençal and Tuscan love-lyrics: here linguistic and musical artifice conspired with historical remoteness to create a rhythm of desire which freed the mind from the immediacy of any "material" possession. (5)

Nicholls's explanation, while nicely contextual, does little to explain why every poet since the rise of materialism hasn't made the same choice.

9. For more on this idea, see Nicholls: ideally,

precision would become the *absolute* test of sincerity; an honest man speaking with clarity would necessarily speak the truth since he was proof against bias or confusion. The implication was that the author must, by definition, possess authority, and that, furthermore, if the method he chose was actively thoughtful, the resulting ideas would be powerful *and* right. (100)

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10. See Hamilton's introduction to *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance* and Longenbach's chapter "Symbolism in Its Profounder Sense" in *Stone Cottage*.

11. Symons repeats his claim on the next page, calling it a "revolt" against exterritoriality, rhetoric, and "a materialist tradition" (scientifism, Marxism, naturalism, and anything else keeping literature from being beautiful).

12. In 1942's "A Visiting Card," after defining the three poetic kinds of style, Pound comments acerbically: "In this last category Eliot surpasses me; in the second [*melopoeia*] I surpass him. Part of his *logopoeia* is incompatible with my main purpose." (*Prose* 321).

13. Morrison provides an equally succinct diagnosis of Pound's problem with symbolist metaphor: "Pound advocates a poetics and politics of tropological stability, of fixed addresses and proper names" (23).

14. Scott continues:

The Symbolist poem is the poem animated, not so much by the voice breathing life into it, as by the mobile eye wandering restlessly forward and back over the page, ensnared in an ever-recurrent and variously momentous instant. . . . [This] permits an art that owes more to forms than to the poet.

15. Certainly Pound begrudged symbolism for this reason by the late thirties. In a letter to Hubert Creekmore, he vents: "God damn Yeats' bloody paragraph. Done more to prevent people from reading *Cantos* for what is *on the page* than any other one smoke screen." (*Letters* 321). The paragraph that irked Pound was from the "Packet for Ezra Pound" (1928, later included in the 1935 book *A Vision*), where Yeats calls attention to the formal structure of the *Cantos*:

He has scribbled on the back of an envelope certain sets of letters that represent emotions or archetypal events—I cannot find any adequate definition—A B C D and then J K L M, and then each set of letters repeated, and then A B C D inverted and this repeated, and then a new element X Y Z, then certain letters that never recur, and then all sorts of combinations of X Y Z and J K L M and A B C D and D C B A, and all set whirling together. (5)

A reader wishing to discover patterns imbedded in the text within which words radiate with hidden meanings is one looking to augment or supplement the text as given; that reader will be more attentive to accumulative and possibly extraneous meaning than what lies "*on the page*."

16. Surette locates the growth of Pound's anti-Semitism (far outstripping the party line of the Italian fascist party) at the beginning of his correspondence

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with the Social Credit sympathizers Hugo Fack, Charles Coughlin, and (to a more limited extent) Arthur Kitson, who also happened to be racists (5–8). Robert Casillo assumes Pound always to have been anti-Semitic and never to have satisfactorily renounced his prejudices, but does locate four stages along an increasingly bigoted trajectory: 1880 to 1910, the “suburban prejudice” period; 1910 to the late 1920s, where anti-Semitism is an ugly but peripheral prejudice; late 1920s to the late 1930s, where Jewish “villainy” begins to figure in Pound’s economic thought, and his writings become openly hostile to Jews; and the World War II years, where Nazified, biological racism becomes part of Pound’s political ideology (4–8).

17. See Redman’s chapters on Orage and Douglas (17–75) and Rainey’s discussion of Pound’s adoring reaction to the fascist magistrate, the *Gran Cordone* Luigi Marcialis, who intimidated the Rimini librarian into providing Pound with full and prompt access to the Malatesta archives. This timely intervention, Rainey suggests, helped prompt Pound to characterize many of Sigismondo’s attributes with recognizably fascist markers.

18. For example, Morrison reads the entire poem as a wake for Pound the aesthete.

19. That is, 60,000 out of the 110,000 that attacked. Paul Fussell’s short account of that battle (12–14), to my mind, remains the most poignant and compelling one available.

20. For example, Pound would return to anaphora in Canto XXX and whenever he wished a torrent of evidence to overwhelm resistance to a given proposition. In XXX, Artemis’s “compleynt” is directed against the gentler nature of those who do not act to root out evil—“Pity causeth the forests to fail, / Pity slayeth my nymphs, / Pity spareth so many an evil thing. / Pity befouleth April, / Pity is the root and the spring”—and insinuates that the source of this deleterious pity is usury: “It is *on account* that Pity forbiddeth them slay” (147; my italics).

21. At the beginning of his other great war-guilt poem, Canto XVI, Pound poses the difficulty of knowing whom to trust when all speakers are potential demagogues. That canto begins “before hell-mouth” at the foot of purgatory by noticing two figures, “On the one mountain, a running form, / and another / In the turn of the hill” (68). One of them is destined for hell, the other heaven—but how to distinguish between the good and the bad agent? The poem abruptly narrates the end of the Great War in demotic French, emphasizing the malfeasance of the general staff and excusing both the French and German soldiers for the way it ended (“Poo quah? Ma foi on attaquit pour manger” [73]). But the canto ends with the Russian Revolution that preceded

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the German spring offensive of 1918 and the insidious rhetoric of the Bolsheviks, who above all else promised action: "There was just a man talking, / To a thousand, just a short speech, and / Then move 'em on. And he said: / Yes, these people, they are all right, they can do everything, everything except act; / And go an' hear 'em, but when they are through, / Come to the bolsheviki" (74). Since Pound's sympathies (as Rainey has demonstrated) were, since the Malatesta cantos, inclined toward Mussolini, his admiring depiction of Lenin at the end of canto XVI is meant to emphasize his similar qualities of *virtù* as well as startle readers into action equal to the challenge presented by the Soviet Union. But apart from opposing communism, it's hard to see how Pound means his readers to distinguish between other sets of competing orators or agents.

22. As Casillo has noted, words like "wanglers" and "pettifoggers" are Poundian code for Jews, whom he came increasingly to blame for rhetorical obfuscation and imprecision:

Far less equivocal was Pound's statement, in a 1937 article in the *British Union Quarterly* (the official publication of the British Union of Fascists), that the "schnorrer press" spreads "vagueness in communication." This statement is an ominous development from the literary anti-Semitism . . . continuous with Pound's belief, especially intense after 1939, that the most pernicious literary and intellectual habits of Westerners derive from Jewish allegory, metaphor, hermeticism, and interpretation. (6)

23. See Thurston's chapter "Getting the Goofs to Listen" and Redman's chapter "The Discovery of Gesell."

24. I see this as a further manifestation of what Redman has called Pound's habit of thinking in dichotomies:

These dissociations were to enable him to articulate clearly his thinking on economic matters. Regrettably, dichotomized thinking can become automatic, separated from observation and complexity, and tend to ever sharper polarities. That symbolic process would lead Pound into trouble during the Second World War, as it became ever more exaggerated and obsessive. (146)

25. And, I suppose, a dare for us to keep on reading. At any rate, since Pound ends the *Guide* with an extended close reading of Rackham's translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, he doesn't meet the dare.

26. The dare involves more acknowledgment of the difficulty in writing the *Guide* than in reading it:

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In the main, I am to write this new Vade Mecum without opening any other volumes, I am to put down so far as possible only what has resisted the erosion of time, and forgetfulness. And to this there is material stringency. Any other course wd. mean that I shd. quite definitely have to quote whole slabs and columns of histories and works of reference. (33)

We might ask why a little research, if it led to precise terminology, would be a bad thing, but hitting the books would be tantamount to surrendering to detail over the big picture.

27. On the subject of usury, he blithely inserts the following aside into a chapter describing historiographical method:

We know that there is one enemy, ever-busy obscuring our terms; ever muddling and muddying terminologies, ever trotting out minor issues to obscure main and the basic, ever prattling of short range causation for the sake of, or with the result of, obscuring the vital truth (31)

Similarly, he launches one last sally at nonfascists in the midst of a discussion of the American Adams family:

Liberalism is a running sore, and its surviving proponents are vile beyond printable descriptions. . . . The definition of liberty, on the Aurillac monument, is the "right to do what harms not others." In our time the liberal has asked for almost no freedom save freedom to commit acts contrary to the general good. (254)

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Reviews

Competing Paradigms of Multiculturalism?

Klezmer America: Jewishness, Ethnicity, Modernity

by Jonathan Freedman

New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 388 pages

Multiculturalism and the Jews

by Sander L. Gilman

New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis, 2006. 293 pages

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Multiculturalism, as an evolving category and concept, has appeared in diverse guises since its emergence in post-World War II American and European discourse and its subsequent proliferation in global contexts. In Western cultural discourse, it inspired a revival of ethnic literatures and suppressed cultural legacies from the 1970s onward. In a more recent development, it has reoriented itself around the notion of hybridity, positing more eclectic and unexpected modes of affiliation across diverse cultural boundaries. To paraphrase Werner Sollors, cultural assent rather than ethnic descent has become, at least in the United States, the determining formative factor in cultural and literary expression. This recent development poses a considerable challenge to versions of ethnic studies that foreground single groups, particularly if these studies wish to map out historical influences. How does one get from point A, ethnic revival, to point B, a hybrid diversity that dissolves fixed boundaries of ethnicity, gender, class, race, and other markers of identity? Does the pathbreaking early work of ethnic studies, by reifying traditional essentialist notions of identity, now stand in the way of our contemporary and more fluid sense of identity? Two recent studies, Jonathan Freedman's *Klezmer America* and Sander L. Gilman's *Multiculturalism and the Jews*, revisit the rich legacies of Jewish American ethnic literatures and critically evaluate their historical influence on the contemporary context of multiculturalism, fleshing out the history of the concept and thereby helping us to assess the current

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relationship between these competing paradigms. Do ethnic legacies evolve in a coherent linear fashion across generations and hence preserve stable coordinates of identity, or do they, by some rupture or leap, end up in a new paradigm where such stable coordinates might dissolve altogether? And if the latter is so, what are the repercussions of these radical developments on our comprehension of ethnicity and ethnic studies in general? Are we reaching a threshold where diachronic analysis based on a stable model of evolution and history has to give way to synchronic analysis that foregrounds an unstable and performative structural grid of provisional identities?

Freedman's *Klezmer America* makes an enthusiastic plea for the quasi-paradigmatic nature of Jewish American literature, art, and intellectual life in the formation of a modern American cultural identity-of-identities: "In their manifold forms of cultural production Jewish writers, artists and intellectuals helped transform the ways in which Americans imagined Otherness" (6). Freedman invokes the obvious example of the immigrant narrative, which he claims is "unimaginable without Jews" (7). In fact, according to Freedman, "Jewish-specific images, sites, experiences have become broadly representative of that social moment itself" and "have built a normative narrative for immigrants across the board" (7). This argument, while stressing the needed inclusion of minorities in the formation of modern American identity, tends to become slightly reductive, as it predicates versions of the Jewish immigrant experience for other immigrant groups such as Italian and Irish Americans and more recently for Hispanic and Asian Americans. Clearly all these groups share parallels in the transition from old-country to new-country values, from broken immigrant English to normative Standard English, and from tradition-driven societies to an accelerated and nontraditional lifestyle in a capitalist commodity culture. However, one also needs to stress the differences in the ways each immigrant group comes to position itself in Anglo-dominant society.

For example, while the Jewish experience may have provided the template for the model minority status subsequently assumed by Asian Americans, as Freedman claims, we cannot overlook equally striking differences in these two groups' histories. Asian Americans, as a non-European cultural group, could not insert themselves into the intellectual fabric of American life determined by Eurocentric traditions in the same way as did Jewish Americans, who were already thoroughly acculturated,

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if not to say experts, in these traditions. Hence Asian American success in post-World War II America may be interpreted as bearing the marks of a model minority from an economic point of view, but it cannot boast of similar success in being perceived as a culturally central voice of American intellectual life. Unlike other migrant labor groups (Italians, Irish, Chinese), Jewish immigrants and refugees arrived as a single cultural group due to massive pogroms and persecution in Eastern Europe at the turn of the previous century, bringing along with them an infrastructure of education. This allowed them to document their history much more actively than other groups could. Migrants from Ireland and Italy arrived without an infrastructure of education, and Asians faced the additional hurdles of entering a foreign and hostile Western culture, so they needed much more time to articulate their own experiences. Asian American immigrant literature appears a generation or more later than its Jewish American counterpart in the late 1930s and comes into its own only in the post-World War II era. And even as this was happening, Jewish American cultural prominence received a further impetus due to the aftermath of the Holocaust. This catastrophic event brought an additional Jewish refugee intellectual culture to America and demanded the full attention of writers and the public in the postwar era, leading to a postwar renaissance of American Jewish culture in the 1950s and 1960s.

Thus, while one agrees with Freedman that Jewish American experience stood at the forefront of social and cultural reform, it could do so only as an incomplete "synechdochal or metonymic stand-in" (8) for other groups who played different roles in the national narrative. In addition, Freedman grossly underestimates the equally significant contribution of African American art and culture, which, while relegated to secondary status in the official national narrative, boasted a literary, artistic, musical, and intellectual vigor that asserted itself in spite of repressive racism. Freedman's use of klezmer music as a metaphor for contemporary American cultural hybridity inflected by Jewish culture makes a poor example when compared to jazz as the quintessential American music and cultural form of expression of modern America. Jazz music, in its unique blend of slave chants, gospel music, blues, and Western music styles managed to articulate an entirely new idiom of musical improvisation, stressing the democratic value of individuals while also alerting its listeners to the ongoing injustices of racism in America, such as the problem of lynching addressed in Billy Holiday's song "Strange Fruit." The claim that jazz

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music was brought into the mainstream via the Jewish Gershwin brothers is inflated, considering the transcultural popularity of figures like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie, to name a few.

Freedman's study, while offering interesting parallels between Jewish American and other emerging ethnic cultures, suffers from its depiction of all these groups as directly indebted to Jewish culture. In the words of Harold Bloom, whose tropology Freedman invokes, one could say that he is attempting to rewrite American cultural discourse as a type of metalepsis, in which all belated voices forever appear to be rewriting the Jewish American experience. Unfortunately, this analogy is limited, even when some examples appear to be telling, such as Gish Jen's novel *Mona in the Promised Land* or Don Byron's early training in Klezmer music before becoming a major voice in African American jazz music. For any of the examples cited by Freedman, one could cite many counterexamples of artists and writers who simply drew on their own ethnic and cultural background and had little contact with Jewish American culture.

Freedman also, and more convincingly, challenges the recent tendency to classify Jews as white in a cultural studies curriculum, arguing that "whiteness critics have effaced the many alternative narratives of Jewish identity formation" (29). Here the argument is on safer ground, beginning with its stress on the significant differences between Jewish American and white mainstream culture in the pre-World War II era. If, since the 1970s, integration, intermarriage, and increased secularism have driven Jewish American culture's successful assimilation into the mainstream, Freedman highlights more recent work by Jewish American writers and musicians that reasserts an affirmative cultural difference. Ultimately, Freedman's book, despite its ethnocentric perspective, addresses the more productive features of hybridity and offers many interesting examples of cultural collaboration. In chapters on Tony Kushner and "Arthur Miller, Marilyn Monroe, and the Making of Ethnic Masculinity," Freedman elucidates how ethnicity, sexual orientation, and the performance of gender are intertwined. A chapter on Philip Roth makes an interesting cross-genre comparison with Douglas Sirk's racial melodramas. Further chapters on recent Asian and Hispanic American writing revisit old immigration narratives with a new emphasis on hybridity. Thus the study in its effort to explore examples of hybrid American culture succeeds on the micro level by giving us many new readings and insights into America's fertile cultural landscape of cross-pollination. The flaw in Freedman's study is

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his attempt to define the new American hybridity in terms of the older ethnic studies paradigm via the concept of monoethnic cultural influence, rather than through a paradigm of interethnic coconstitution of cultural identity. Hybridity is not discovered by a single group but rather emerges in the encounter of two or several cultural groups.

A different way of conceiving of multiculturalism might point to its areas of conflict rather than its discoveries of shared hybrid identities. As Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have pointed out, multiculturalism, rather than offering a harmonious symphony of diverse voices, frequently presents a contestation of competing claims.¹ Sander Gilman's new study needs to be seen against this background of an evolving multiculturalism in which legacies of slavery, colonialism, the Holocaust, and painful immigration stories all vie with one another to be heard, often in open conflict. In *Multiculturalism and the Jews*, Gilman stops just short of inventing a new cultural syndrome based on Freud's notion of penis envy, namely Jewish envy. Why is it, Gilman asks, that present discourses on multiculturalism are obsessed with "Jews," a numerically small minority, in an era when their diaspora has more or less come to an end and successful acculturation has been achieved in various countries? Jewish citizens, for example, no longer enjoy affirmative action promotion in the United States, where they are seen as "white" and well integrated. Likewise in Europe, the law generally protects existing small Jewish communities. In short, Jews have ceased to be a minority in the sense of an underrepresented group, and yet they appear frequently as the litmus test for other minorities in contemporary discourse and literature.

Readers familiar with Said's seminal essay "Reflections on Exile" may attribute the obsession with "Jews" to the regrettable situation that puts minorities in competition with one another. However, why would one envy a minority that no longer counts as a minority or enjoys minority promotion per se? Are other minorities inherently anti-Semitic, perhaps having displaced their own self-hatred onto the Jewish community? Or has the Jewish community drawn the envy of other groups because of the extensive documentation and corresponding recognition of its history as a persecuted minority? Amidst the conflicting identity claims that mark the present landscape of multiculturalism, one reads Gilman's study with a certain sense of empirical reservation: Does Jewish multiculturalism in Europe and the United States really set a possible paradigm or template for the multicultural experience of other groups? Undeniably, its rich

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documentation of various traumas of secularization, modernization, assimilation, genocidal persecution, marginalization, and extermination presents us with an important body of work that can indeed serve as an educational grammar for other minorities. Yet one also recalls, for instance, the embarrassing laughter of African American teenagers during a pedagogical screening of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.² In the face of competing ethnocentricities, one wonders if other minorities are willing to read this body of work seriously, or if they simply approach it with a facile envy articulated in various stereotypes of successful or unsuccessful "Jews" establishing the litmus test for one's own successful or failed acculturation. Gilman's study appears to suggest the latter, in the process subtly undermining its own claims for the polyvalence of Jewish multiculturalism. Regardless of this inherent conceptual contradiction, *Multiculturalism and the Jews* traverses a large body of information, ranging from Jewish Enlightenment culture to the early twentieth century and into the present. Typical of Gilman's oeuvre, each of these periods is framed by a consideration of the Jewish body, whether pertaining to the changing ritual and cultural observations of the Jewish community internally or to external prejudices distorting the Jewish body in anti-Semitic fashion into stereotypes of a foreign object unassimilable by its various host cultures.

The first part of the book largely documents the ambition of Jewish migrant communities to achieve acceptance in their European or American host countries. Frequently, Gilman points to the community's own self-delusion about the possibility of and terms for achieving such acceptance. In the words of the German Jewish philosopher Gershom (formerly Gerhard) Scholem, German Jewish cultural dialogue proved to be an entirely imaginary discourse, thereby ignoring the increasingly dangerous marginalization of the Jewish community:

I deny that there has ever been such a German-Jewish dialogue in any genuine sense whatsoever . . . and today when the symphony is over, the time may be ripe for studying their motifs and for attempting a critique of their tones. (qtd. in Gilman 19–20)

Gilman literalizes Scholem's metaphor by discussing at length the conflicting landscape of nineteenth- and twentieth-century musical culture in Europe. Jewish musicians' strenuous attempts to disprove cultural stereotypes, such as Richard Wagner's notion of the soulless and inherently nonmusical Jew, produced staggering evidence of Jewish musical talent but

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did little to disprove stereotypes in the German host countries. Musical geniuses such as Meyerbeer, Mahler, Zemlinsky, and Schoenberg, violin virtuosos Joachim, Kreisler, Menuhin, and Heifetz, conductors like Bruno Walter, and even the amateur but quite accomplished violinist Albert Einstein initially failed to achieve cultural recognition outside the Jewish community. True multiculturalism could hardly be achieved in America via an immigration/assimilation pattern that required either wholesale assimilation (Israel Zangwill's melting pot paradigm) or cultural separatism and quasi segregation (Horace Kallen's call for cultural diversity). Gilman's historical overview provides telling examples and case studies of Jewish post-Enlightenment cultural figures (Israel Zangwill, Horace Kallen, Franz Kafka, Albert Einstein, the hermaphrodite N.O. Body aka Karl Baer) that push for versions of multiculturalism but in the end fail to fully make their voices heard beyond their own communities.

Whereas the first part of the book takes us through familiar Gilman terrain, revisiting his well-known earlier studies *Jewish Self-Hatred* (1990) and *The Jew's Body* (1991), it is the second part that will appeal most strongly to students of contemporary literature and multiculturalism. In various case studies of modern British and American authors, Gilman explores the manner in which Jewish culture is represented or appropriated for the purpose of establishing multicultural identity claims. Here Gilman uncovers the surprising tendency of multicultural literature to deploy stereotyped "Jews" as a quasi-comparative standard for other minorities. Gilman convincingly poses the question of the degree to which other minorities can fairly represent the diversity of the Jewish community without resorting to racial or physical stereotypes that frame Jewish bodies as either failed or successful metonyms for the immigrant narrative, and thus as figures of contempt or envy.

Reading, for example, Hanif Kureishi's short story "We're Not Jews" (1997), Gilman notes that Kureishi trades in negative physical stereotypes, arguing that "Kureishi's image of the Jew's language is tied closely to physicality" (150). In the short story Jews appear as "illiterate tiny men with downcast eyes and mismatched clothes" (qtd. in Gilman 150), and Gilman infers that "language confusion, exile and cosmopolitanism are all qualities of the image of the Jew in the world of Kureishi's characters." One could argue that Gilman's reading misses Kureishi's subtle and ironic pedagogical purpose in depicting a mother who comforts her son of mixed white and Indian background, subjected to British bullying, by

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assuring him that "We're not Jews" (qtd. in Gilman 149). Kureishi's story here draws attention to the fact that there are no innocent positions in multicultural encounters. The mother is white and thus is shunned by her own community for having crossed racial lines, yet she still relies on racist discourse to cope with her difficult situation. In line with Gilman's more critical point of view, however, one could say that such a presentation appears far-fetched and may after all reveal unconscious stereotyping by the author himself. Since the story contains no corrective presentation of Jewish diversity, it implicitly reinforces anti-Semitism, albeit in an ironically qualified sense.

Gilman likewise finds the image of the Jew as misfit in the character of Joshua Chalfen in Zadie Smith's best-selling novel *White Teeth* (2001). Smith describes Joshua as "a 'smart Jew,' an outsider" (Gilman 160) and depicts him as "pasty, practically anemic, curly-haired and chubby" (qtd. in Gilman 159). His family, the Chalfens, to the extent that they are "more English than the English" (qtd. in Gilman 160) likewise confirm the stereotype of Jews possessing "a natural mimicry as part of their difference." As Gilman deconstructs the stereotype, "They can transform themselves into any nation or people. By doing this, they prove that they remain Jews."

Gilman does not, however, wish to discredit important multicultural authors by pointing to their unfortunate willingness to trade in stereotypes. Rather, he wishes to show how Jewish identity has become at once an over- and underdetermined trope in multicultural discourse. Writing from an ethnocentric perspective, present-day multicultural authors are not above embarrassing lapses: "They moaned about Jews even after we knew what the poor beggars had been through" (Andrea Levy, *Small Island*; qtd. in Gilman 165). Or in Gish Jen's novel *Mona in the Promised Land* (1997), conversion to Judaism of the Chinese heroine requires that "that nose of yours has to grow out so big you've got to sneeze in a dish towel" (qtd. in Gilman 170). Why do these blatant stereotypes recur in multiculturally trained and sensitized ethnic authors? Have imaginary "Jews" become the competitive standard for successful acculturation, or does such an imaginary normative standard simply project one group's sense of displacement at the expense of another minority? According to Gilman, "various global discourses about multiculturalism marginalize the 'Jews' while often using the Jewish experience as one of the models for the multicultural" (179). Gilman's uncomfortable emphasis on the per-

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sistence of blind spots in ethnic authors ultimately leaves us with a more realistic and less idealized notion of multicultural discourse.

Gilman's argument thereby raises the legitimate question of whether multiculturalism and identity politics are indeed structurally supplemented and supported by erroneous claims about other groups and minorities. His chapter "Are Jews Multicultural Enough?" offers an exciting selection of new Jewish literary voices who try to avoid the pitfalls of identity politics by presenting complex, contradictory, and ironic stories about what it could possibly mean to be Jewish. Yet Gilman himself overlooks these authors' tendency to stereotype members of other groups in these works. And even where his examples avoid embarrassing and obvious stereotypes, they frequently make Jewish identity, no matter how diverse, the standard of multiculturalism and the cosmopolitan. This equation of Jewish identity with multiculturalism subsumes other groups, as if they had little to contribute to the discovery of the paradigm. For example, Gilman argues that the Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua offers in his novel *Mr. Mani* (1993) "the potential of a Jewish multiculturalism as including all cultures" (186): "Jerusalem is its own multicultural universe in which Jews reside as one of the peoples of the city. Even the Muslims are, in the last resort, merely Jews of a different stripe" (187). As the novel further notes, "the Arabs of the country were merely converted descendants of Jews" (qtd. in Gilman 187). This type of incorporation may not succumb to the pitfalls of physical stereotyping but nonetheless constitutes a hegemonic and coercively assimilative attempt to subsume the cultural Other.

In spite of this shortcoming, Gilman's study provides an important and much-needed discussion of contemporary Jewish authors (Michael Chabon, Cynthia Ozick, Jonathan Safran Foer, Gary Shteyngart, to name a few) caught in the middle of, and seeking to remake, an evolving identity politics. In the work of these authors, as well as that of Kureishi, Smith, Levy, and Jen, multiculturalism appears as a messy paradigm still dominated all too often by ethnocentrism. This ethnocentrism may reflect the prevailing landscape of cultural and social segregation in America or of an equally divided Europe where ethnic groups live in parallel societies alongside the mainstream. In fact, one can speculate that in the ongoing process of cultural modernization and conversion of religious into ethnic identity, we may not yet have reached the multicultural landscape proper, which, for lack of more precise terms, has to be defined as a hybrid and culturally interpenetrating realm. In such a world, group labels would have

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to give way to entirely new formations existing outside of and beyond stereotyped ethnic categories. This landscape thus may not be the terrain of ethnic writers in the old sense. In this new context, identity politics would also have to give way to new perceptions of cultural horizons of coexistence and coinfluence already shared in intersocial and communicative worlds. This construction lies, arguably, in the province of aesthetics, a domain unfortunately underaddressed in Gilman's or Freedman's critical and materialist studies of the symptoms of competing multiculturalisms. Aesthetics, committed at least in principle to disinterested perceptions rather than reflecting the interests of groups, construes its worlds entirely for the benefit of play and experimentation with new roles and cultural formations. Such perceptions challenge those that are presumably grounded in empirical facts but remain, as Gilman's study compellingly shows, more or less disguised stereotypes of and bars to the open communicative world that we share prior to such stereotyping.

Notes

1. Said's remark that "Exile is a jealous state" (360) particularly highlights the problem of "an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you." And as Bhabha notes, "Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture—and the people—as a contentious, performative space" (157).

2. The *New York Times* reported:

On Jan. 17, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, school was closed and a science teacher offered to take 70 high school students to see the Holocaust movie "Schindler's List," although they begged to see "House Party 3." When a trip to the ice-skating rink was thrown in to sweeten the deal, they accepted.

But the field trip ended abruptly when theater patrons complained that some of the Castlemont High School students, most of whom are black, had laughed at a scene in which a Nazi soldier casually shoots a Jewish woman. The theater owner stopped the projector, turned on the lights and told the students to leave. ("Laughter at Film")

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The South, the Nation, and Global Cosmopolitanism

The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism

by Leigh Anne Duck

Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006. 340 pages

Caroline Miles

Revisionary theories of regionalism have burgeoned in recent years, including works by such scholars as Richard Gray and Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr., who have questioned prevailing assumptions about the South, challenging our notion of the region as disconnected from everywhere else. Leigh Anne Duck's impressive interdisciplinary examination of the "ideological functioning" (2) of seeing the South as a national aberration is a noteworthy contribution to this larger conversation. Seeking to interrogate this old view of an insular South steeped in tradition and racism, Duck's book explores the ways in which the complicated circuits connecting modernism, nationalism, and the South have bolstered segregation and racism.

Duck uncovers associations among the South, modernity, and global cosmopolitanism through her analysis of film, popular and experimental modernist literature, reviews, and other primary sources. Her method, which is formalist, historicist, and psychoanalytic, allows her to explore how the partition between the South and the nation has been socially constructed as well as how it might have been individually experienced. By drawing on psychoanalytic theory, she investigates how individual desires and anxieties intersect with broader ideological and historical trends. In my estimation, this approach constitutes a real strength of her study because it resists the usual critical rift between historicist and psychoanalytic approaches and permits her to illustrate "the profound interactions between psychology and social life" (10). Although her book covers the period from the 1920s through the 1950s, she identifies the 30s and 40s as decades in which experimental and progressive writers negotiated overlapping regional, national, and global discourses in an especially dynamic

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way. She documents that while in the 1920s images of a stationary South effectively provided a way for the nation to hold on to cherished values, by the 30s Southern backwardness became viewed as an urgent national problem, and American writers began to look at the relationship between the nation and the South more closely. These writers, according to Duck, discovered the buried ideological consequences of both othering and celebrating Southern difference.

Duck shows how responses to the alleged difference between the South and the region have shifted over time, arguing that the 20s serve as important “background to the book’s examination of the 1930s and 1940s” (21), whereas the 50s illustrate how dominant discourse worked to undermine the progressive values and attitudes formulated in previous decades. However, given her own assertion that the period between the 30s and the 50s fostered an unusual desire to contest portrayals of a South culturally and economically detached from the nation, it seems somewhat surprising as well as disappointing that she doesn’t dedicate more space in her book to later writers.

In the first section of her book, “Imagining Affiliation,” Duck discusses how between 1890 and 1930 “monolithic understandings of ‘the South’” functioned to “contain contradictions between divergent models of U.S. citizenship” (19) and to deny the fact of racism while appearing to criticize it. This thesis seems more familiar than new, echoing for example Teresa Goddu’s analysis of the Southern gothic. Still, Duck gives some useful readings, explaining, for example, how local colorists set out to critique marginalization and racist stereotypes of the South but were received as racist disavowals of racism in the nation at large. Her examination of D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* and Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman* as vehicles of a transregional white unity exemplifies vividly how the nation imagined a national collectivity grounded in whiteness, exclusion, and national segregation, with white non-Southerners participating in white supremacy (via the South) while at the same time denying the centrality of such racism in US nationalism. The startling implication here is that whether the South was perceived as separate from or affiliated with other regions, it was used to promote racism.

Duck continues to explore the role of the South in national fantasy in chapter 2, demonstrating how intellectual and popular writing in the 1930s put an emphasis on regionalism as a way both to provide more balance between tradition and change and to ameliorate anxieties about

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modern progress and the loss of certain values. Pluralist liberal nationalism (the belief that the diversity of local life could strengthen the nation) became dominant during this time, and is reflected, Duck maintains, in the popularity of both Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and the book and film versions of *Gone with the Wind*. In Capra's film, regionalism, even if represented as naive and childlike, balances the corruption of modernization. In *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara's modern ways exist alongside interracial affection based on racial hierarchy and the dehumanization of African Americans. This provided a picture of the South, Duck suggests, that both mitigated America's fear of Southern aberration and imaginatively localized hierarchical race relations in the South.

"Modernist Mappings," the second section of Duck's book, looks closely at Southern modernist writers of the late 30s, who, despite seeming to depict an inert region, in fact struggled to reexamine this attitude toward the South by representing individuals traversing overlapping regional and national times and places. Duck does an excellent job of demonstrating the "temporal complexity" of Southern experimental fiction during this time and proving how formal innovations were particularly suited to "explore the potentially unsettling experience of modernity's multiple temporal forms" (8). She proposes that Southern authors may have played a part in the broader shift by the end of the 30s toward antisegregation and the staging of more productive and progressive "intersections among southern, national, and global temporalities" (13) in the 40s. It is a shame that the book does not take more time to unravel these complexities, and less time contextualizing the writers, especially since the close readings she does provide are, for the most part, very good.

Chapters 4 and 5 present some of the sharpest and most satisfying arguments in the book. Duck reads Zora Neale Hurston's work against dominant critical assessments that locate her textual worlds outside of national modernity, either seeing them in terms of African American communal values or as "representing the 'folk' in a way that accommodated a nation quick to exploit people who had been marginalized from economic development" (115). Many African Americans, Duck suggests, viewed the South and its folklore as backward and outside the experiences of Northern blacks; they saw the folk as radically different from the modern and argued that trying to exist within both would destroy the individual. Examining Hurston's work in this context, Duck brings to light Hurston's insistence that folklore could be useful in negotiating

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the modern and even important in sustaining the individual amidst the effects of modernization. Duck also looks at the way in which *Her Eyes Were Watching God* focuses on the loss associated with social change and modernization, with the characters using folklore to engage the modern as well as to construct a protective space isolated from capitalist bourgeois values and practices.

In chapter 5, Duck places William Faulkner's use of the gothic in the context of both cosmopolitan modernism and Faulkner's participation in "modernity's temporal multiplicity" (147). Like Joyce, Conrad, and others, Duck asserts, Faulkner uses the gothic to explore the psychic fragmentation and damage resulting from individuals' temporal dislocation. While her point is that Faulkner was not a writer entrenched in a secluded Southern time and place but rather one who shared literary connections with other modernists in America and Europe, Duck again spends much time contextualizing Faulkner and summarizing other modernist works, leaving less time than one might like for her thought-provoking examination of how Faulkner's characters challenge and dismantle the notion of a homogenous and stabilizing "shared white southern cultural identity" (147) accessed through memory and a communal relationship to the past. Duck's argument does, however, allow her to identify Faulkner's late career turn from the gothic as part of a broader movement away from spectacular representational forms, a shift that according to Duck can largely be understood as a response to the civil rights movement that led to the nation's understanding more explicitly that segregation and racism were US rather than Southern problems.

The last section, "The Shifting South," explores how writers in the 40s and 50s looked more overtly for productive dialogues between "history and contemporaneity" (174). Chapter 6 considers how progressive Southern writers such as Richard Wright, Lillian Smith, Carson McCullers, and James Agee found new ways to situate the South in relation to other national and global spaces and "to articulate and advance southern cosmopolitanism" (178). While earlier avant-garde Southern writers employed form to challenge "the belief that the South existed in a distinct and pre-modern time" (184), writers of the 1940s working in the context of civil rights discourse represented multiple and conflicting temporalities without the formal complications adopted by earlier writers.

The final chapter illustrates how, despite the work of these progressive writers to showcase the undeniable connections between national

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and regional space and time, by the 1950s the South again became, in a context of heightened Cold War rhetoric and anxiety over the speed of progress, a site for imaginatively containing national anxiety and fostering discrimination. Both William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Duck claims, show how the discourse of triumphalism, which represented a nation "marked by inexorable forward motion," was "as mystifying as cultivated backwardness" (218).

In a rather dense reading of *Requiem for a Nun*, Duck explicates how characters that resolutely reject national temporality cling to a deeply rooted cultural heritage that is on the one hand depoliticized but on the other hand used to justify arguments against federal interference in Southern segregation. Such arguments, she declares, were based on the idea that laws won't change individuals' deeply ingrained cultural beliefs. Her reading of *Invisible Man*, meanwhile, suggests that the narrator's belief in progressive linear time leaves him incapable of understanding history or his own memories, ultimately indicating that "beneficial political practices . . . must emerge from attending to the critical perspectives of those previously excluded from political participation" (234). Duck also concludes that scholars should strive to avoid both old problematic concepts of a static South and models of progress that dismiss the past.

Duck certainly makes a convincing argument that the perceived gap between South and nation has encouraged racism in the US and that new cultural divides currently marginalize debates about race and globalization. I might add, however, that the ideological barrier between South and North has also functioned as yet another way to divide workers both in America and globally. The fact that Duck's study marginalizes the issues of class and labor is not so much a criticism of her book as an observation about the ongoing tendency of scholarship, especially Southern studies, to ignore class in favor of race and to obscure the connections between them.

Overall, Duck's thorough and energetic approach to her material, as well as her insightful evaluation of the relationship between nationalism and regionalism, makes this book well worth reading and a significant addition not only to the field of new Southern studies but also to scholarship on American literature and culture more broadly. Her work valuably suggests that representations of temporality, affiliation, and collectivity can both perpetuate and illuminate racial oppression and other injustices in the US and beyond.

Saving Appearances:

Another Ezra Pound Biography

**Ezra Pound: Poet. A Portrait of the Man and His Work.
Volume 1: The Young Genius 1885–1920**

by A. David Moody

Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2007. 507 pages

Leon Surette

This book is the eighth full-scale biography of Pound so far, the first of which appeared in 1960 and the latest in 2004, and I understand that two more are in progress. In addition, there are a half-dozen specialized biographical studies, among them Tim Redman's excellent *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (1991) and my own *Pound in Purgatory* (1999)—neither of which rates a mention in Moody's highly selective list of writing by others. The omission of Redman is perhaps justified because his study is mostly concerned with Pound's life after he moved to Italy in October 1924, but my study begins well before Moody's cutoff date of 1920. Other omissions are C. David Heyman's *Ezra Pound: The Last Rower* (1976), John Tytell's *The Solitary Volcano* (1987), and most surprisingly James Longenbach's *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (1988). Moody explains that his list of writing by others includes only works that are referred to frequently. But that only compounds the problem of a selective attention to previous scholarship. It is true that some of the omitted works are mentioned in notes, but their authors' names are not indexed, making it difficult for the reader to ascertain Moody's agreement or disagreement with his predecessors—or his ignorance of their work. None of the previous scholarship is engaged in the text itself. The result is that instead of being guided through the thickets of Pound scholarship, the reader is given the impression that Moody is the first to traverse this terrain. If the reader is diligent enough to turn to the notes—which are collected by page, not superscript number, toward the back of the book—she will find a very combative attitude toward that scholarship in several instances.

Matters of scholarly etiquette aside, the first question a reviewer must ask is: does this work justify still another biography of Ezra Pound?

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Does it bring anything to Pound studies that is not provided by previous biographies? To some degree, the answer to the second question is yes. Among the full-scale biographies—with the exception of Ira Nadel's 2004 study, *Ezra Pound: A Literary Life*, a work that presumably appeared too late to catch Moody's attention—Moody alone has access to published correspondence that his predecessors had to search out in archives; and he makes copious use of that resource. (Moody has also visited many archives and consulted unpublished materials. He cannot be faulted on that score.) Easy access to the correspondence permits both Moody and Nadel to provide a closely detailed account of Pound's literary life. However, in Moody's case this is a mixed blessing. His narrative is fragmented by the practice of redacting details from Pound's correspondence with a particular individual for several pages, and then turning either to another edition or to Pound's poetry published during the period in question for several more. The result is a peculiarly disjointed narrative.

It is admittedly difficult for biographers to resist reliance on Pound's correspondence, for he was an inveterate letter writer. So copious is his correspondence—always typed—that one wonders how he found the time to write as much poetry as he did. For the period Moody covers in this volume, most of Pound's correspondence was concerned with his own publications or that of others he was promoting, such as Eliot and Joyce. The letters offer interpretive commentary on those works only rarely, and even more rarely reveal his moods, loves, hopes, or fears. Indeed, Pound's correspondence reveals a man who seemed to have no private life at all. (A partial exception is the recently released correspondence with Olga Rudge, his long-time mistress and mother of his daughter Mary.) Given the copious volume of correspondence, biographers have little choice but to mine it for their portrait of the man. Nonetheless we are left in this biography with a portrait of a poet and impresario, gaining little insight into the deeper psyche of a man whose passionate commitment to causes destroyed his reputation among his friends and peers and cost him more than a decade of incarceration. (He was "incarcerated" but never "imprisoned"—held in a mental hospital for 13 years, having been found unfit to stand trial for treason.)

Instead of breathing some life into the writing machine that Ezra Pound's letters reveal, Moody takes a narrow perspective on the man as poet. He alerts his readers to such a focus in his subtitle: *A Portrait of the Man and His Work*. But the portrait of the man rather disappears behind

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the work. It must be admitted that this is a common failing of Pound biographies. Part of the reason, no doubt, is that Pound's personality leads him into very unappealing places. Studies that stress his personality are usually extremely negative, such as Robert Casillo's 1988 study—not, admittedly, a biography—*The Genealogy of Demons*.

For every volume of poetry Pound published in the period under examination, Moody provides a detailed paraphrase and assessment of virtually every poem—almost always finding them masterful and marking a new departure in the history of poetry in English. This practice makes for a very trying reading experience, and Moody's wide-eyed amazement at Pound's genius at every stage of his career becomes wearing—at least for this reader, who is already familiar with the poetry. (In fairness, I should concede that some of Moody's readings surprise me, while others fail to persuade—but that is to be expected.)

In this respect Moody's biography is a throwback to the sort of scholarly commentary that was common in the 1950s and 60s, when scholars and publishers believed that undergraduate and graduate students were hungry for explication of the deliberately paratactic and highly allusive modernist poetry. For those who need and want a running commentary on Pound's poetic production, Moody provides a sensitive and mostly reliable guide. For those who would like to have a judicious assessment of the reasons the modernists wrote in such a rebarbative manner, Moody provides little sustenance.

Of course, Moody has a broader agenda than merely to explicate Pound's poetry for the uninitiated. Part of it is to protect—indeed to redeem—Pound's reputation. This is a task that the late Hugh Kenner, the dean of Pound scholars, undertook with great success 37 years ago in *The Pound Era*. That study ended the long-standing academic neglect of Pound's work, moving it toward the center of modernist studies. Although Moody names Kenner in his acknowledgments as the "foremost" of those "critics and interpreters of Pound's work" to whom he is indebted, Kenner's views and assessments are rarely considered in the body of the text—as, indeed, are those of the rest of the Pound scholars mentioned there.

Of course, most readers will be grateful to be spared academic squabbling over the justice, truth, or adequacy of the various judgments about Pound's poetry and the opinions, ideas, prejudices, and enthusiasms they express or reflect. Like Kenner, Moody's clear purpose is to persuade his

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readers to accept Pound's self-assessment as a world-class genius capable not only of reinventing poetic practice and creating a modern epic but also of guiding his contemporaries with his political and economic wisdom. A biography, one would think, should delve into the motivations that led a man to adopt the views he held and the practices he employed. In Pound's case many of those are controversial, some are of dubious merit, and others are downright unattractive. But in Moody we find precious little assessment of Pound's motives beyond purely aesthetic ones.

We have had enough studies portraying Pound's self-assessment as hubristic, his politics as misguided, or his economics as moonshine. It is not my view that Moody should have added to that literature. But surely, as a biographer, he should attempt to account for Pound's views on politics, religion, and economics. Instead, his strategy is to discount the relevance of nonaesthetic aspects of Pound's career. As a result, he comes across as a Pound idolator rather than a disinterested scholar of a twentieth-century literary figure. (I should note here that Moody has taken exception to an earlier brief review by me that appeared in the *T. S. Eliot Newsletter*. He was especially hurt by the epithet "Poundolator" and hurled back at me the epithet "iconoclast," a choice of epithet that pretty well confirms his status as a Poundolator.)

As already noted, Moody makes copious use of precedent archival, bibliographical, and biographical scholarship—occasionally correcting or amending it with his own research—but he seldom engages that scholarship where it challenges his admiration for Pound. So far as preceding detailed critical commentary on Pound's poetry is concerned, Moody gives it scant attention. No doubt he has read much of the commentary over his long career and may be excused for a failure to acknowledge every interpretive debt or to note every interpretive disagreement. But to proceed as a New Critic confronting the text in the purity of a personal aesthetic encounter seems not only anachronistic but woefully inadequate for a poet like Pound, who was notoriously engaged in the history of his time. Previous critics have explored that engagement, and they have come to judgments concerning it that are starkly at odds with Moody's.

One aspect of Pound's belief system that Moody is anxious to debunk is that Pound shared, in Moody's words, "Yeats' fascination with what is loosely called 'the occult', as some have argued" (242). The unnamed "some" are notably Massimo Bacigalupo, James Longenbach, myself, and Demetres Tryphonopoulos. (The conscientious reader can find

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three of those names in a note to page 242, but not in the text.) Moody claims—quite correctly—that Pound was not interested in Yeats's efforts to communicate with ghosts (242). However, talking to ghosts is peculiar to Spiritualism, a nineteenth-century innovation of the Fox sisters of Hydesville, NY, and hardly counts as occultism at all. Occultism, as Moody knows, is the claim to possess occult—that is, “hidden”—knowledge known to artists and mystics but denied to less sensitive souls. Such wisdom, many an occultist believes, is esoterically transmitted in works of art. Moody frequently evinces the conviction that Pound—like all true poets—has such knowledge. Indeed, he claims it for Pound on the very next page: “He [Pound] very likely thought that his own powers of mental vision were superior to those of Yeats’ ‘fat old woman in Soho’.” He then compares Pound to the mystical William Blake: “Pound too cultivated those states of mind in which the universe came alive to him” (243).

To add insult to injury, Moody describes as “magisterial” a scurrilous article by Colin McDowell attacking my 1993 study *The Birth of Modernism* and Tryphonopoulos's 1992 study *The Celestial Tradition*. In fact, the article is a defense of Pound's occult interests, objecting only to the label *occult*, which Bacigalupo (in *The Formed Trace*), Tryphonopoulos, and I apply. Nor were we the first; Herbert Schneidau had pointed out the occult provenance of many of Pound's beliefs in his 1969 study *Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real*. Schneidau's views were quietly occluded by the Pound industry, but our more recent and more detailed study of that aspect of Pound's belief system has required a frontal assault. Let me quote from my preface to *The Birth of Modernism* on the issue:

My hope is to identify both the nature and the provenance of a set of ideas, attitudes, and concerns that are ubiquitous in modernism. . . . These ideas, attitudes, and concerns I call “the occult,” deliberately choosing a strong term instead of more honorific terms such as the “wisdom tradition,” “Platonism,” “symbolism,” or even “the literary tradition”—or more simply, and more obscurely, “the tradition.” Although these terms are not all equivalent, they are commonly used as a kind of code for beliefs that might more properly be called the occult and are employed to darken a scene that might not comfortably bear the harsh light of day. (5)

Clearly Moody wishes to maintain the scholarly smoke screen occluding Pound's “alternative” religious beliefs.

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Moody's discussion of the less respectable—or positively odious—opinions, beliefs, and attitudes Pound embraced at various times is characterized by the sort of devious defensiveness found in this note on Pound's interest in the occult. When Moody comes to the rocky reception of Pound's 1919 poetry sequence *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, after two and a half pages of paraphrase, he turns to allegations that Pound's grasp of Latin was shaky—as it certainly was—complaining that *Homage to Sextus Propertius*'s “relation to modern life has been ignored while debate rages about its relation to Propertius' Latin” (352). This is a typically broad-stroke dismissal of previous commentary, and is not to be trusted. The most extended discussion of the sequence is J. P. Sullivan's 1964 study *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius*. Sullivan does not ignore the “relation to modern life” of the poem. However, he does find that relationship to be handled imperfectly. “The regrounding of Propertius' sensibility in Pound's twentieth-century milieu,” Sullivan concludes, “is not as successful as, say, Johnson's adaptation of Juvenal” (23). Moody directs his readers to Sullivan's study but lets his canard stand.

He is also distressed by Pound's well-documented belief that the Albigensian heretics of twelfth-century France possessed forgotten ancient wisdom, which they shared with the Provençal troubadours. Moody triumphantly points out on page 191 that Pound ignored Mont Ségur in 1912, when he was in the vicinity of that site of the heresy's final destruction. And when Pound does visit the site seven years later, Moody maintains that Pound's “mind now was not simply preoccupied with the religion and culture of the troubadours' Provence [as it had been previously?] but was reaching for a larger conception of history in which their story would be just one of many such ‘luminous details’” (359). Pound's alleged lack of interest in the heretics has now morphed for Moody—quite accurately, incidentally—into just one of many such interests. This kind of vacillation makes the book a seriously unreliable guide to Pound's career and opinions.

This volume takes us to 1920, which includes Pound's infatuation with Major Douglas's Social Credit monetary theories and his prescriptions for the governance of nations. Despite the importance of Douglas and Social Credit to Pound's career, Moody gives it only five pages (372–76). Both Redman and I have argued that Pound's economic radicalism underpinned his enthusiasm for Mussolini and ultimately led to his anti-Semitism. Moody, of course, begs to differ, but he gives no hint

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as to what Social Credit policies and theories were. He dismisses the economic arguments by (falsely) alleging that Pound “hardly bothered with the technical and strictly economic arguments.” The most detailed and authoritative discussion of Pound’s economic views is my own 1999 study *Pound in Purgatory*. It does not support Moody’s breezy dismissal of Pound’s engagement in economic theory, but he neglects to mention that work here.

Although Moody maintains—with some justice—that Pound’s interest in Social Credit was “on the basis of ethics or equity” (374), ethics and equity cannot be divorced from political and economic policy. Pound, after all, believed his admiration for Mussolini and his anti-Semitism were grounded on ethics and equity. Moody does address Pound’s anti-Semitism (delicately)—a topic quite properly put off to the proposed second volume. After citing a few anti-Semitic remarks Pound made prior to 1920, Moody comments: “Those remarks do show him lapsing on a very few occasions into the endemic antisemitism of the time; and they do indicate a flaw that was to grow, in the 1930s and after, into a most grave failing.” While I agree with Moody that Pound fell into the “most grievous error” of anti-Semitism, the genesis of it was not “the endemic antisemitism of the time” but rather Pound’s commitment to Social Credit—a commitment that placed him in the company of virulent anti-Semites such as Douglas himself, the English economic radical Arthur Kitson, the radio priest Father Coughlin, and the German expatriate and Gesellite Hugo Fack.

A disappointment for readers who know Moody as an Eliot scholar is the almost complete neglect of the early relationship between Pound and Eliot following Eliot’s arrival in London in the summer of 1914. We find only scattered references to Eliot in the six years up to 1920, when this volume closes, and no extended discussion of their early association. Perhaps Moody is saving that for the next volume, in which Pound’s editing of *The Waste Land* will surely be discussed.

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Edith Wharton and Victorian Visual Culture

Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts

by Emily J. Orlando

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007. 250 pages

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An engaging and comprehensive study of Wharton's representation of women as well as the representation of women by male contemporaries in the visual arts, *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* marks a distinguished contribution to Wharton scholarship. Offering meticulous readings of key novels and of short stories that have largely been overlooked, in addition to detailed analysis of nineteenth-century images of women, this study corrects an unfortunate misreading of Wharton that has led some critics to hold suspect her depiction of women as well as her sympathies toward them. Orlando argues convincingly that we must recognize Wharton's "scathing critique" (4) of the misrepresentations of women sometimes enacted by her male contemporaries and dramatized in the faulty vision of her male narrators.

The argument, elegantly supported by the organization of the book, locates the progress of Wharton's heroines in the voyage "from victims to agents in the visual marketplace" (22). Indeed, what the author shows us is the way Wharton's women manipulate the culture of display in order to "locate power in their bodies, particularly the art they produce with their bodies" (11). *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* employs its groundbreaking investigation of Wharton's engagement with Pre-Raphaelite paintings and poetry to highlight what it convincingly argues is Wharton's "realist revision of the sexual politics of nineteenth-century literature and visual culture" (22–23). One emerges from the book with a thorough understanding—and a long-overdue critical assessment—of Wharton's extensive engagement with the art of painting.

Orlando displays a delightfully keen art historian's eye in her attention to the influence of specific paintings on Wharton's work. The introduction includes one of the most provocative illustrations from the collection of nineteenth-century art pivotal to Orlando's argument, Alfred Stevens's *The Painter and His Model* (1855). Orlando's detailed discussion

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of the figure of the model who, along with the artist, looks at a painting of herself, provides an excellent context for her assessment of Wharton as a social critic intensely aware of the predicament of women in a culture that puts them on exhibit. Stressing the significance of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood on nineteenth-century art and on Wharton's work, Orlando contends that these painters' popularity and the impact of their overly sexualized portrayals of women, as well as their infatuation with aestheticized depictions of women's deaths, provided Wharton with a basis from which to critique the portrayal of women's bodies in the culture at large. Counting on the fact that her audience would be familiar with, indeed inundated by, the Pre-Raphaelites' portrayals of women, Wharton brings her own heroines to life with an alternative vision. Working in the tradition of ekphrasis, the practice of invoking actual works of art in literature, Wharton emerges as one of American literature's most gifted intertextual realists, "deeply committed to interrogating and intervening in the sexual politics of representation" (19). This aspect of Orlando's intricate argument bears significance for fields as diverse as art history, cultural history, women's studies, American literature, and Victorian literature.

Orlando's opening chapter addresses the moments in Wharton's fiction when women are enshrined in art. Early short stories such as "The Muse's Tragedy" (1899), "The Moving Finger" (1901), and "The Duchess at Prayer" (1900) show women figuratively or literally "killed" into art. With scrupulous close readings, Orlando reveals Wharton's reworking of the paradigms of prominent nineteenth-century male artists (Poe, Hawthorne, Browning, Balzac) "such that they tell a sobering truth about the state of women with respect to the politics of representation" (23). Orlando further asserts that these heroines stand in stark contrast to the later women who commission their own objectification and thereby find some agency. This chapter demonstrates Wharton's resistance to the notion of woman as art, a resistance that registers more in the uncomfortable positions women inhabit in these stories than in their overt opposition to the system.

Taking up the case of Lily Bart in her second chapter, Orlando argues that *The House of Mirth* marks a shift in the role that women play with respect to image making in Wharton's oeuvre. Though the earlier heroines remain "icons onto whose bodies male desire [gets] superimposed" (13), Wharton "lets her Lily manipulate the power of imaging to her advantage by overseeing her objectification as a work of art" (55).

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Orlando's enlightened discussion of *The House of Mirth* hinges on her brilliant analysis of the painting that Lily portrays in the novel's well-known tableaux vivants scene, Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Portrait of Joanna Lloyd of Maryland* (c. 1775–1776). Following an overview of the phenomenon of tableaux vivants in the nineteenth century, which helps to contextualize the significance of Wharton's gesture, Orlando provides a detailed assessment of the Reynolds portrait as it rubs up against the style of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. She reminds us at this point of the images of women disseminated by the Brotherhood—women often pale, sleeping, or reclining—in order to assert the power inherent in Wharton's choice of Mrs. Lloyd for her Lily. Mrs. Lloyd is standing; she does not look out from the painting but concentrates on her task, which Orlando suggests preserves her own authority. That this task consists of writing only furthers Orlando's sense that this moment affords Lily, by way of her depiction of Mrs. Lloyd, a certain kind of liberty and confirms her role as an artist. As Orlando maintains, Lily's "body becomes her art" (56); Lily is "in control of what others see" (70); and while Wharton's earlier women may "find death in art, it is there that Lily finds life" (56).

Although it is tempting to allow Orlando's inspired reading of the portrait of Mrs. Lloyd to close the book on our assessment of Lily, she argues that the tableau scene invites more complicated questions. Certainly Orlando's careful critique of the Reynolds painting furthers our understanding of the novel so greatly that it seems astonishing no one has considered the works side by side with such care before. At the same time, however, the author astutely recognizes that Wharton's relationship to the representation of women—as her novel progresses and as her career progresses—remains riddled with ambivalence.

This ambivalence may be detected in Orlando's comparison of Lily with Wharton's lesser-known heroines, most notably Kate Arran of "The Potboiler," in order to draw out the connections between the "voyeuristic imaging of women as objects" (55) and prostitution. Since she "lets art—as a commodity that brings in revenue—work *for*, not against, her . . . Kate signals a new kind of Wharton heroine invested with survival instincts" (58). Kate eludes the male impulse to enshrine her in art, and yet her compromise stands in stark contrast, as Orlando notes, to the choice that Lily makes and that ultimately destroys her. Orlando's attention to the significance of conscience for the Wharton heroine is particularly provocative here, and reveals the terms of Wharton's ambivalence. Though

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she allows a character like Kate Arran to survive, Wharton still registers uncertainty about the possibilities for a woman to *thrive* in a world where she must choose between conscience and existence. Orlando explains this predicament explicitly: "Wharton suggests that having a conscience proves fatal," though we might "reconcile Wharton's elimination of Lily" by considering that which Wharton spares her, namely the renunciation of conscience, a metaphorical (or real) prostitution, the cunning avarice of a character like Undine Spragg (86). For Lily Bart, conscience leads to ethically justifiable though self-defeating decisions; for Kate Arran, conscience is overruled by pragmatism. The later Wharton heroines, "compromising, and at times *compromised*, women" (86), as Orlando calls them, represent yet another way to look at the picture. They show what conditions women were compelled to accept for the sake of power and survival.

In her third chapter Orlando examines specific paintings Wharton alludes to in *The Custom of the Country* (1913), "The Temperate Zone" (1924), and the two-part narrative *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and *The Gods Arrive* (1932). Describing Undine Spragg of *The Custom of the Country* as a "revised Lily Bart" (88), Orlando makes clear that Undine's power—aggressive and self-preserving as it is—does not prove as satisfying. Here again Orlando underscores Wharton's ambivalence about the power that women obtain by marketing themselves as works of art:

Undine serves as a harbinger for Wharton's purposeful women of the twentieth century who can and do survive, notwithstanding the fact that they increasingly lack consciences, and their lives are colored by compromise. (104–45)

In making this argument she turns to both Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's *Portrait of Josephine at Malmaison, 1805*, the painting chosen by Undine for her ball costume, and John Singer Sargent's *Mrs. Ralph Curtis, 1898*, which may have inspired Wharton's description of the self-portrait Undine commissions. Both paintings, Orlando argues, present Undine as self-possessed and commanding. She decidedly "does not strike a pose as a broken, dead or dying Pre-Raphaelite heroine" (99).

But it is Orlando's reading of "The Temperate Zone" that shows Wharton's most piercing revision of the work of the Pre-Raphaelites. She asserts that Wharton "draws recognizable parallels" (106) between her heroine, Bessy Paul, and the two great muses of the Pre-Raphaelite

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artists, Jane Morris and Elizabeth Siddall—real-life women who haunted the poetry and painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Orlando presents as epigraph to this section a phrase that William Michael Rossetti used to describe his brother's infatuation with Jane Morris, the notion of the muse as a reservoir of "inexhaustible beauty." Wharton's plot, however, reverses the power relations in the epigraph so that the muse comes out on top: "Rather than letting her beauty be 'exhausted' by the male artist—as if it were a sort of reservoir at his disposal—Wharton's new heroine will exhaust, as in make use of, her own beauty to her own end" (106). Wharton does not rest in this triumphant reversal, however. In her ensuing discussion of *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*, Orlando points out that the later Wharton heroines, in particular Halo Tarrant, reveal Wharton's misgivings about the possibilities for women in relationship to art. Wharton, Orlando takes great pains to prove, must be read foremost as a realist writer who often delivers a rather unpopular message. That is, even as the Progressive era wields its images of the New Woman, Wharton continually questions the possibilities of progress for women—at least in the United States.

The heroines in the series of short fiction that Orlando addresses in chapter 4—"The Angel at the Grave" (1901), "The House of the Dead Hand" (1904), "The Rembrandt" (1900), "Mr. Jones" (1928), and the novella *Summer* (1917)—serve as "allegorical female artists or women whose 'custodial work' connects them to the art world" (132). Wharton's career coincided with the high tide in the development of the American museum, a time, as Orlando informs us, "when women began to make serious headway as authorities with respect to art" (126). Yet as Orlando's illuminating discussion of the history of the museum makes clear, Wharton's stories are "cautionary tales" that "advise women on the limits of power within the art world, despite the contemporaneous advancements for women in the profession" (133). The male viewer in Wharton's later tales frequently conflates the real women in the story with the painted women of museums. Wharton again points to actual paintings in these works, which Orlando critiques with a masterly eye, though sometimes the stories contain imaginary or lost works of art. Orlando reminds us that we must consider not simply the representations of painting in Wharton's fiction but also the source of the descriptions of the artwork. Wharton's use of male characters (or narrators who favor the male protagonist's view) shows both the slipperiness of the image (because so often the male

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protagonist is a poor reader) and the assumption that authority resides in the hands of the male.

Women in these stories are often trapped in houses, paintings, museums; the art to which they are linked both sexualizes and strips them of power. According to Orlando, the fiction that she addresses in this chapter

lays bare Wharton's interest not only in the function of the art museum and the spaces it failed to provide women but also in the changing definitions of art. Wharton evidently had some ambivalence about art as a cultural value and the meaning her world attached to it. (167)

Though this chapter indicates that Wharton's ambivalence rendered her questions about representation and women's power perpetually unanswered, the final chapter suggests that there is promise for the Wharton heroine once she shifts the paradigm of woman as art to that of woman as artist. Wharton continues to show the ways male characters misread creative women, but she ultimately affords one remarkable heroine the ability to face not visions but realities—perhaps the strongest endorsement for a realist writer to make. Orlando also frequently demonstrates a strong alignment between Wharton and her heroine, Ellen Olenska, both transplanted, thus liberated, American women who make their home in the very same Parisian neighborhood. In this sense, Orlando's argument and, by extension, Wharton's argument has “reached a conclusion” (25) in the Countess Olenska, a character who offers the promising possibility of an American woman artist.

Indeed, in her final chapter Orlando regards Ellen Olenska of *The Age of Innocence* as “a kind of remedy to the problem of women, art, and representation in turn-of-the-century culture” (171). Orlando makes a compelling case for this reading of Ellen by showing how critics have misread Newland Archer, the male protagonist. Resisting a prevalent—and overly sympathetic—reading of Archer as a victim, Orlando argues persuasively that he is instead a “poor reader” whom Wharton employs to critique the “cultural tendency to read women as representations and not as representers” (173). Wharton uses the items in Archer's library and the paintings he has viewed—and more importantly the way he views them—in order to show the dangers of objectifying and “framing” women. Archer's inability to live in the real world, his desire to remain

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locked inside a fantasy of painting and poetry, would be decidedly antithetical to the realist project that is Wharton's. Her use of paintings such as Carolus-Duran's provocative *La dame au gant* (Lady with Glove, 1869) and poems like Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life*, as Orlando explains, accentuate Archer's role as "the kind of institutional connoisseur that Wharton critiques throughout her fiction" (183).

Orlando's reading of *The Age of Innocence* turns on her discovery of the Wharton heroine not as art object but as artist in her own right: "Wharton demonstrates that, in spite of the portraits Archer serves up, *Ellen* is in fact the artist" (185). Ellen has learned to draw from a model, dance and sing; she also arranges her apartment inventively, not fashionably; she reads naturalist or realist authors, not romances; and most importantly she possesses what Wharton calls elsewhere the "seeing eye." Though Archer aims to make her a Pre-Raphaelite lady-in-waiting, she resists his romanticizing impulse in order to face, as she poignantly calls them, "realities." Orlando contends that Wharton's most important maneuver comes at the close of the novel, when "Ellen's body . . . remains withheld from view—an editorial move that spares Wharton's heroine the consuming gaze to which the earlier heroines were subjected" (193).

Orlando's sense of the significance of Wharton's engagement with the art and images of her day and its impact on her own representation of women comes to full fruition in her cogent concluding analysis of *The Age of Innocence*. Here she argues that Wharton

deflates the myth of the American woman and challenges the tradition that assigns her to types: either woman-as-artless (ingénue, angel, Diana, American Girl) or woman-as-art (femme fatale, dark lady, imaginary beloved, Pre-Raphaelite stunner).
(195)

The conclusion brings together themes central to the entire book:

the unseeing eye, with which so many of Wharton's men are marked; Wharton's intertextual project with nineteenth-century visual culture, especially the work of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites; and Wharton's investment in locating a space for the American woman artist. (172)

Taking its cues as it does from the rich allusions Wharton provided, this splendid study remakes our understanding of Wharton by demonstrating

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her complex relationship to art, to her own culture, and to the representations of women that she both resisted and created. Orlando's thorough knowledge of Wharton scholarship, her skill as a reader and historian of art, and her perceptive close readings of Wharton's fiction come together with remarkable weight in a book that showcases the value of reading works of literature in relation to the other lively arts.

A "Synchronous but More Subtle Migration": Passing and Primitivism in Toomer's *Cane*

Paul Stasi

In part 1 of *Cane* we encounter a poem that has seemed to many of its readers to articulate the project of the book as a whole, namely, the recovery of the vanishing world of the South by a Northerner who has, at long last, returned home:

Song of the Son

Pour O pour that parting soul in song,
O pour it in the sawdust glow of night,
Into the velvet pine-smoke air to-night,
And let the valley carry it along.
And let the valley carry it along.

O land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree,
So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,
Now just before an epoch's sun declines
Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,
Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee.

In time, for though the sun is setting on
A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set;
Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet
To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone,
Leaving, to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone.

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O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,
Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,
Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare
One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

An everlasting song, a singing tree,
Caroling softly songs of slavery,
What they were, and what they are to me,
Caroling softly souls of slavery. (14)

Like so much of the volume, this poem begins with dusk, the “parting soul” of the first stanza linked to the declining “sun” of the second, each somehow connected to the “land and soil” to which the speaker has returned. While it figures Toomer’s interest in all the colors between black and white, dusk also marks the end of an “epoch,” that of slavery, persisting in the “passing” “race of slaves” whose songs Toomer wishes to memorialize. “Song of the Son” seems, then, to rehearse the basic structure of modernist primitivism, the “race of slaves” providing inspiration for a weary modern poet.¹ As I will show, however, this view fails to take account of *Cane*’s insistence that the “premodern” South and the “modern” industrial North are contemporary aspects of the same historical moment.

Two recent readings of this poem have, in different yet compatible ways, begun to overturn the seeming primitivism of Toomer’s lyric. Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr argue that while the speaker hopes to counter “time’s mutability with the permanence of art,” this project falters as the “world Toomer’s narrators would like to articulate in song continually eludes them” (164). Karen Jackson Ford finds a similar tension between the book’s aestheticizing impulses—its desire to “listen, record and preserve both the culture of the slaves and [the speaker’s] connection to them” (31)—and its gradual recognition that the harsh realities of Southern life are not amenable to lyric vision. Lyric poetry, the discourse “of idealism, the past, and hope,” gives way, in Ford’s account, to prose, the “discourse of realism, modernity and tragedy” (43). In each case, then, “Song of the Son” puts forward a discourse that the volume itself refutes—a failure, each critic is careful to note, that one can find in the ambiguous language of the poem itself.

While these arguments are compelling, they miss what I will argue is a crucial aspect of “Song of the Son” and, by extension, *Cane* as a whole:

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namely, the way it makes an argument not about the “demise of the African American folk spirit and the trend toward modernization” (Ford 30) but rather about the subjective investment of its rural Northern speaker in this vision of the disappearing rural South.² Indeed, the poem’s ostensible object of address, the vanishing way of life of the race of slaves, barely appears at all. “Song of the Son” is not about rural Southern African American culture and its supposedly rejuvenating powers—whether this rejuvenation is shown to work or fail—but rather about the poet’s desire for this recuperation. And as I will argue, it is precisely here in this framing of the speaker’s primitivism that we can find the intersection between the volume’s modernist form and its interest in racial politics.

The poem begins with an injunction—“Pour O pour that parting soul in song”—though not until the third stanza do we find the object of the speaker’s address: “Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet / To catch thy plaintive soul soon gone.” Somehow it is the soil’s soul that is captured in the songs; or so it seems until the final stanza, where the souls are said to be “of slavery” itself. Where, in all of this, are the slaves who do the singing?

Addressed in the fourth stanza, the Negro slaves are “dark purple ripened plums,” figured as natural objects, like the young Karintha, who “ripened too soon” (*Cane* 4). Throughout *Cane* we find this naturalization of the rural African American subject who exists in an unconscious unity with the land, like the unnamed girl in “Carma” who “does not sing; her body is a song” (12). It is this particular quality of the South that could, ostensibly, rejuvenate the artist figure, allowing him access to a more primal relationship to the natural world than that allowed by his overly modern sensibility.

Again, though, the souls the poem seeks to capture are not those of black folk but those of the land, even of slavery itself, and the songs that contain them are called “everlasting.” Life is short, art is long, an easy separation belied by the idea of slavery’s soul. For the songs are about a social institution—slavery—a fact that explains the violence of their preservation. The “dark purple ripened plums” of the Negro slaves, Toomer writes, are “Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air. . . . One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes // An everlasting song, a singing tree.” Sixteen years before Billie Holiday, Toomer describes his own strange fruit, the bursting of the Negro plum on the singing tree of the rural South. At the heart of this pastoral image is a subtext of violence, the disclosure of

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the conditions—the continuities between slavery and Jim Crow—that have produced and preserved the folk culture the artist here is personally invested in recovering. And the idea of personal investment is precisely to the point, as *Cane* depicts not only the subjects and songs of the rural South—what those songs “were”—but, crucially, “what they are to me.” The poem acknowledges that its presentation of Southern rural culture describes the desires of its narrator at least as much as it does the actual landscape to which he has returned. It is, after all, a “Song of the Son,” not the “Song of the South.” *Cane* thus engages in a project I would call modernist: the foregrounding of the authorial perspective from which the book is produced, the recognition that knowledge is always articulated from a specific subject position—here, that of a Northern African American subject returning to his “roots.” Primitivism emerges as a product of modernity itself, figured as the gaze of the Northern educated artist. I will call this primitivism the modernist production of blackness, a term meant to suggest the interested perspective from which the book’s representations of the rural African American subject emerge.

In making this argument I intend to contribute to recent discussions of *Cane* that have attended to the political implications of its literary form.³ Following important work by scholars such as George Hutchinson, Barbara Foley, and Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr, it has been impossible to ignore Toomer’s interest in the political questions of his day. At the same time, a richer understanding of the book’s formal innovation has emerged in writing by critics such as Catherine Gunther Kodat, Rachel Farebrother, and Karen Jackson Ford. What I hope to do in this essay is continue the project of investigating the politics of Toomer’s formal choices by reading *Cane* in relation to both the context of the Jim Crow South and a selection of Toomer’s post-*Cane* autobiographical writings. While these writings have often been dismissed by critics as Gurdjieffian idealism, I contend that we misread Toomer’s career if we posit an absolute break between *Cane* and the later work.⁴ Following Toni Morrison’s insight that “race is unequivocally the overriding preoccupation of Jean Toomer’s life: not Blackness or even being a Negro, but having (or having to have) a race at all” (qtd. in Gates 221–22), I propose that *Cane* calls into question the very search for racial origins it seems, on a first reading, to embody.⁵ And it does so not by demonstrating the failure of this search but rather by investigating the historical conditions that produce the motives for it in the first place, mobilizing modernist techniques that

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unseat the logic of visual racialization underlying the Jim Crow South. Modernism, in my account, provides a set of aesthetic practices that allow Toomer to question the logic of racialized discourse present both in what Saidiya Hartman calls the "legislative production of blackness" (186) and in the nostalgic primitivism that would seek to discover an "authentic" blackness in a supposedly premodern South.

To make this argument I will first address the intertwined questions of passing and migration as they were articulated in the Jim Crow South, then offer a sustained reading of *Cane*. Finally I will turn to Toomer's post-*Cane* autobiographical writings to examine their movement toward a fully miscegenated America, a projected historical development that Toomer refers to, pointedly, as passing.

Plessy v. Ferguson

In 1896, Homer Plessy took a seat in the white section of a segregated Louisiana train. He then declared that he was black and was promptly arrested, leading ultimately to the Supreme Court decision that made "separate but equal" the law of the land until the Voting Rights Act of 1964. Three features of this decision are relevant to my reading of *Cane*: the fear of miscegenation it betrays, the logic of visual legibility that undergirds that fear, and the projection of sociohistorical facts onto the African American subject resulting from the decision.

In largely compatible readings of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Saidiya Hartman and Amy Robinson both argue that the decision rests on the exclusions that define a self-legislating liberal subjectivity. For Hartman, the crucial context is Reconstruction, with its upswelling of antimiscegenation laws attendant on the potential inclusion of blacks in the nation-state. She writes:

The changes wrought by this massive upheaval and revisioning of citizenship also instituted a collective crisis, since black exclusion and subordination formerly had defined membership in the civic and political community and the scope of rights and entitlement. The integrity and self-certainty founded upon the division between master and slave races was now without foundation. (183)

What Homer Plessy's dangerous passing revealed was the instability of

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white privilege, for “if blackness was no longer visually discernible, then how was racial integrity to be preserved?” (195). The court’s answer involved an appeal to two seemingly incompatible principles. The first was what the decision called the “established usages, customs and traditions” that prevented whites from wishing to associate with blacks (198). The second was the idea of identity as property, the principle on which Plessy’s lawyer, Albion Tourgée, based his case. Tourgée argued that “in any mixed community, the reputation of belonging to the dominant race, in this instance the white race, is *property*” (qtd. in Robinson 243). The court’s response was to agree—identity *was* property—but to stipulate further that “the act of passing” made Plessy “the bearer of stolen property” (247). Justice Brown’s decision thus wrote “into Supreme Court precedent the Lockean formula for the ‘natural rights’ of citizenship” (247–48) whereby everyone “has a property in his own person” (Locke 134) and therefore “qualifies for other ‘natural rights’ insofar as he initially and primarily possesses himself” (Robinson 245). Robinson elaborates:

To consider the individual as an owner of property in his own personal identity is to attach a fixed and “pure” meaning to a *relation* that is constitutively social and necessarily “infected” with contingent formulations of social value. (250)

But the self-possessed subject represents a rejection of the very “customs and traditions” to which the court’s decision also appealed. Its ruling rests, then, on a simultaneous invocation and denial of a constructivist model of identity.

What Hartman calls the “legislative production of blackness” can be read as an effort to bring these two competing principles in line with each other by turning segregationist “customs and traditions” into the naturalized result of irreconcilable racial difference. Taking a cue from the Supreme Court’s argument that the Fourteenth Amendment was not intended to “enforce . . . a commingling of the two races” (qtd. in Hartman 197), postbellum society set about trying to preserve the visual legibility of race through a massive legislative effort against miscegenation. Thus, Hartman argues, the “natural affinity” that supposedly led to racial segregation was written into law, as the state became obsessed with “pure blood, procreation and legitimate union” (185). And as the various one-drop rules illustrate, it was clear which race was capable of contaminating the body politic and, therefore, required the most vigorous policing

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and surveillance. In this way, Hartman concludes, "blacks gained entry to the body of the nation-state as the expiators of the past, as if slavery and its legacy were solely their cross to bear" (132), as if they and not their former masters, nor the social structures of slavery, were the cause of miscegenation.

The "legislative production of blackness," then, can be understood as a process by which social relations—both the relational qualities of identity and the segregation resulting from the history of slavery—are transformed into an ontology of racial difference. And this ontology of difference is underwritten by a visual economy that reads these social relations onto the body of the racialized subject and then projects this exterior distinction onto the interior of that subject as the very grounds of that subject's identity. It is this double displacement embedded in the logic of *Plessy v. Ferguson*—social relations displaced onto an exterior that is then imagined to accurately represent an interior—that I will call the fetish of race.

This fetish bears a strong resemblance to what Frantz Fanon referred to as "the fact of blackness" (109). This "fact" is, for Fanon, actually a process by which the racialized subject becomes the "slave . . . of [his or her] own appearance" (116). The "fact of blackness" thus represents, as Jeremy Weate has argued, the "repression of history" constitutive of "biologic discourses around race" (174). What Fanon's essay reveals, in Weate's account, is the differential experiences that attend different forms of embodiment. For Weate, Fanon thus presents a critique of universalizing assumptions about embodied experience, but he does so not to abandon universalism but rather to insist on the universal as something to be created: "precisely because it cannot be given and does not function as the *a priori*, being is therefore an *ethical* ideal—it is the ideal of a community that is yet to exist and yet *ought* to exist" (179).

This description of the ethical ideal attendant on embodiment can help us articulate what is at stake in the logic of passing I have been describing, for passing represents not the movement toward the future but a continuation of the past. As Plessy's case indicates, passing is not as subversive of the "fact of blackness" as some contemporary scholars seem to hope, for while passing does suggest that identity is fluid and indeterminate, it nonetheless depends on the existence of the very binary structure it attempts to undermine.⁶ The passing subject, in fact, reifies the very divide that is his or her enabling condition of possibility. Passing rests, as I have already noted, on the idea of a self-legislating subject,

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able to determine his or her identity by individual choice. And even as this subject constitutes itself via a repression of history, it upholds those very “established usages, customs and traditions” that constitute the visual economy of race. Passing thus relies on what Robinson calls the “system of power relations that constructs the meaning of what we see” (248). Furthermore, these same power relations are at work in the acts of “classification, surveillance, and regulation” that Hartman describes (186), acts that produced the fetish of race in the first place. Far from being subversive of the past, then, the passing subject is constituted by that past, thus disallowing the movement toward the sort of nonracialized future Toomer longed for. Like Homer Plessy, the individual who passes can escape his or her conscription by the fetish of race only by capitulating to the visual economy that polices the distinction between black and white.

As we shall see, notions of passing and migration have typically haunted accounts of Toomer’s career, though it seeks to resist this visual economy of racial distinction—whether in the binary understanding of race present in passing or in the idea of authenticity present in the migration narrative—and move instead toward the ideal community yet to exist, which Weate locates in Fanon’s essay. It is to the intertwined logic of passing and migration that I will now turn.

Cane

In “Crossing Over,” an article in the December 1926 issue of *Opportunity*, Elmer A. Carter discusses the “yearning for freedom” present in “a movement among Negroes of far-reaching significance” (376). “The migration of Negroes from the South to the North” has, Carter notes, recently caught scholarly attention, but he is interested in a “synchronous but more subtle migration” that has “aroused no comment.” This migration is “nothing less than the crossing over of thousands of Negroes from their own race to the dominant white race,” a phenomenon “known among Negroes” as “passing” (377). The roots of passing, Carter continues, are in miscegenation, and thus in the Nordic blood, which “cries out for succor from the veins of the dusky African bushmen,” and is the very condition of possibility for passing itself. And for those African Americans whose ancestors have not been touched by “the protecting arm of civilization,” there is “another force . . . aimed at the extermination of the black” race altogether: science, whose “latest miracle” is the ability to create hair with-

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out kinks (377, 378). Here at last the African American will find freedom. "Hallelujah," Carter concludes—"trouble over."

Carter's piece is, clearly enough, a critique of passing, which he reads as a form of racial treachery manifesting a desire to be white that has, as its nightmarish conclusion, the disappearance of the black race altogether. But what is most interesting about this critique is that its terms themselves migrate from one side of his comparison to the other: the Great Migration emerges as the retreat from blackness that Carter believes passing to be. He thus implicitly links the notion of racial authenticity to the South itself. To remain black seems to require remaining in the South. Furthermore, since racial passing is "more synchronous," geographical migration must be more diachronic, a movement not only through space but also through time. Carter's essay thus engages in what we might call the temporalization of space; its critiques of passing spill over into a reading of the Great Migration, each emerging as the rejection of an authentic racial subject rooted in the terrain of a premodern South.

This combination of ideas is, according to Farah J. Griffin, characteristic of migration narratives, which "attempt to come to terms with the massive dislocation of black peoples following migration" (3). Portraying "the movement . . . from a provincial (not necessarily rural) Southern or Midwestern site (home of the ancestor) to a more cosmopolitan, metropolitan area," migration narratives as she sees them encode a historical journey from an older way of life, rooted and ancestral, to a rootless, cosmopolitan modernity. Drawn to the North by inexorable economic forces, "Negroes are seen . . . not as actors capable of affecting at least some part of their destinies," Lawrence Levine writes (264), but rather as the objects of history, which has lifted them into modernity. Once again space becomes time: the South is the past, the North is modernity, and the African American subject loses agency, rendered the pawn of an inevitable modernization. In its investment in this modernization narrative—resting, crucially, on a fetishization of roots and ancestry—the migration narrative threatens to become ahistorical, for it attempts to fit the contemporaneous regions of North and South into an idealized pattern of development even as it transforms the African American subject into history's object.

Critics have often viewed *Cane* as just this kind of diachronic—and, therefore, paradoxically ahistorical—migration narrative. Certainly, there is some evidence for such a view, as for example Toomer's statement in a letter to Waldo Frank:

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Dont [sic] let us fool ourselves, brother, the Negro of the folk-song has all but passed away: the Negro of the emotional church is fading. A hundred years from now these Negroes, if they exist at all will live in art. . . . They are passing. Let us grab hold while there still is time.⁷ (*Cane* 151)

And so Toomer seems to have done. Feeling that a “growing need for artistic expression [had] pulled me deeper and deeper into the Negro group” (*Reader* 16), he traveled to Sparta, Georgia, and produced *Cane*. The result, he told Sherwood Anderson, was that “[m]y seed was planted in *myself* down there. Roots have grown and strengthened” (18). Toomer seems, here, to articulate the standard logic of the migration narrative: the South as the home of a rooted, premodern racial authenticity.

Not nine months later, responding to a proposed advertising campaign that wanted to emphasize his Negro background, Toomer made one of his most famous statements about race: “My racial composition and my position in the world are realities which I alone may determine” (*Reader* 94). Reversing the values of both Carter’s essay and his own letters, Toomer rejects the idea of racial authenticity and seems to articulate the distinctly American individualism that scholars have recently located in the logic of passing.⁸ Faced with this apparent contradiction, critics have chosen sides, positing a break between the heavily racialized text of *Cane* and the later, largely unpublished material that seems to leave the subject of race behind altogether. The result is a peculiar biographical criticism that, oddly enough, can situate *Cane* on either side of this “break” in Toomer’s career. Catherine Gunther Kodat notes that the

temptation to read Jean Toomer’s *Cane* as something of a modernist experiment in autobiography is strong, and scholars who do so fall into two camps: those who see the work as a tribute to the discovery of a true self, and those who read it as testimony to the failure of an attempt to make that discovery.⁹ (1)

Similarly, Ford describes a divide between critics invested in a “poetics of depiction,” who find in the text a higher form of realism, and those invested in a “poetics of disruption,” which registers the “indeterminancy of racial identification” (2). *Cane* is either the stable ground the later work rejects, or, due to its fragmented form, it represents a disillusionment with the notion of racial roots that leads directly to Toomer’s disavowal of black subjectivity.

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Cane is not, however, about the return—whether successful or failed—to a premodern past. Rather, it insists on synchrony; the industrial North and the rural South are contemporaries. In portraying this simultaneity, the book seeks to undo a series of binary formations derived from diachronic history, binaries that Toomer's critics have often reproduced. On the side of the premodern, we have instinct, emotion, dark skin, women, poetry, the rural South; on the side of modernity, repression, intellect, light skin, men, prose, and the industrial North.¹⁰ Toomer, on the contrary, seeks to accomplish what he argued his close friend Waldo Frank had achieved in *Holiday*. "Frank is too subtle," Toomer writes, "for an arbitrary portioning of repression . . . to the whites of the South; for a rigid symbolizing of the blacks as expression" (*Essays* 7). Instead, he shows how "each race . . . within itself, contains the contrasting elements." Just as Toomer once claimed to let his various racial components "live in harmony" (*Reader* 16), so he imagines for himself an aesthetic that would illustrate the coexistence of the modern and the rural, that would see the two as necessarily containing each other. And he does so by arguing explicitly for the impossibility of a nostalgic return to a premodern past. Instead, he believes that the artist must work with what he or she inherits:

The aesthetic of the machine, the artistic acceptance of what is undeniably dominant in our age, the artist creatively adopting himself to angular, to dynamic, to mass forms . . . these things have life and vitality and vision in them. (*Reader* 17)

What the machine lacks is a certain "spiritualization" which he hopes to facilitate: "I think my own contribution will curiously blend the rhythm of peasantry [sic] with the rhythm of machines." Similarly, Toomer compares his interest in form to a tree, but then claims that

the symbol is wanting, of course, because a tree is stationary, because it has no progressions, no dynamic movements. A machine has these, but a machine is all form, it has no leaves. Its very abstraction is now the death of it. Perhaps it is the purpose of our age to fecundate it? (*Reader* 21–22)

Toomer here differentiates the simultaneity of peasant and machine—the South and the North of his book—from the stasis associated with roots. His book will, instead, be constituted by dynamism, by movement, but not the linear movement associated with both primitivism and migration.

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In the first place, Toomer's use of movement actually furthers the book's presentation of simultaneity, as the book's tropes migrate from one section to the other so that the two regions of the United States seem as interrelated as he found the races in Frank's *Holiday*. Thus elements of the "modern" world help constitute the supposedly "premodern" South of section 1. Karintha's story, for instance, is marked not by the rhythms of agriculture but by those of the sawmill, whose closing time prompts the women's "supper-getting-ready songs" (3). Trains appear in section 1, both in "Becky" and "Fern"; and King Barlo in "Esther," despite being the best cotton picker in the town, drives "a large new car" (25). This image recurs in section 2, in "Box Seat," where Dan Moore observes an old black man and thinks: "Saw the first horse-cars. The first Oldsmobile. And he was born in slavery" (67-68).¹¹ By presenting synchrony alongside movement, *Cane* distances itself from the static world of primitivism.

More importantly, though, Toomer repeatedly figured both his book and his presentation of race as a circle, a figure that here suggests the links I have been discussing among stasis, primitivism, and linear history. "CANE'S design is a circle," Toomer wrote in a letter to Waldo Frank; it moves

Aesthetically, from simple forms to complex ones, and back to simple forms. Regionally, from the South up into the North, and back into the South again. Or, from the North down into the South, and then a return North. From the point of view of the spiritual entity behind the work, the curve really starts with Bona and Paul (awakening), plunges into Kabnis, emerges in Karintha etc. swings upward into Theatre and Box Seat and ends (pauses) in Harvest Song. (*Cane* 152)

Tracing a circle, Toomer here suggests that our "spiritual" journey through the work could begin with "Bona and Paul," the last story of section 2, and emerge with Karintha, the book's first piece. His second movement, though, North to South to North again, concerns narrative perspective, the first section offering a view of the South from a Northern point of view, the second offering the North as seen from the South.¹² Perspective is, perhaps, initially a result of place, but it is not rooted, like a tree; rather, it is in motion, like a machine.¹³

Toomer's second use of the circle appears in another of his letters, creating a link between this unseating of linear temporality and the un-

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seating of racial essentialism. Toomer writes: "My own letters have taken Negro as a point, and from there have circled out. Sherwood [Anderson], for the most part, ignores the circles" (qtd. in Pfeiffer 99). *Cane's* circles may begin with the Negro, but they migrate, and essentializing its racial subject fails to recognize this central movement. Whether light-skinned or dark, white or black, Northern or Southern, no one character gets to stand in for the abstract subject, in whose name the exclusions of the African American from the body politic were legally justified. North and South, rural and modern: each view is conditioned by the larger social world of early twentieth-century America. Set in this context, the book's emphasis on skin color emerges not so much as a fetishization of race but rather as a foregrounding of the fact of miscegenation, which Toomer hoped would lead to the ultimate version of relational identity: a form of desire that would literally make everyone related.

In this respect, Toomer may sound naively idealistic, aligned with those supposedly ahistorical modernists and their often inflated hopes for social transformation.¹⁴ While there is a grain of truth in this critique, Toomer nonetheless realizes that this miscegenation will not proceed without resistance, a point he illustrates by undermining any idealizations of the South the reader might entertain. Consider the final story of section 1, "Blood-Burning Moon," about Tom Burwell's and Bob Stone's competing desire for the oak-colored Louisa. Out of jealousy, Tom, who is black, seriously wounds Bob, who is white, and the white townsmen respond in their inevitable way. Letting out a yell, an auditory parallel to the slave songs that echo throughout the volume, the mob cheers as the "[s]tetch of" Tom's "burning flesh soaked through the air" (36). Concluding part 1 of *Cane*, this scene is perhaps the most dramatic example of the violence that permeates the "simple" rural way of life.

In the poem "Portrait in Georgia," Toomer links this historical violence to the pastoral, artistic perspective that would aestheticize it:

Hair—braided chestnut,
 coiled like a lyncher's rope,
 Eyes—fagots,
 Lips—old scars, or the first red blisters,
 Breath—the last sweet scent of cane,
 And her slim body, white as the ash
 of black flesh after flame. (*Cane* 29)

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As several critics have noted, this is a blason: a genre of poem about a female subject who is objectified and dismembered via the enumeration of body parts.¹⁵ In its articulation of the connections among desire, miscegenation, and lynching, "Portrait in Georgia" literalizes this critique. It describes the desired white woman in terms of the consequences of acting on that desire, the violent responses that make this racially transgressive desire legible on the black body.¹⁶ The enumeration of the white woman's qualities is here inseparable from the violence consequent upon the desire her features provoke. And in its final comparison of "her slim body, white as the ash / of black flesh after flame," the poem suggests that it is precisely the elimination of black flesh that creates the white body.¹⁷ The construction of the white subject rests, once again, on what it would exclude: both "black flesh" and the desire that flesh once betrayed. And this exclusion extends to a critique of the violence inherent in artistic representation, into the historical subtext that swells up into this seemingly static portrait.

This critique of visual representation is taken up explicitly in Toomer's 1921 review of Richard Aldington's *The Art of Poetry*. "We of the Western world," Toomer writes ironically,

whose thoughts have been shaped and moulded by the poets from Plato (Goethe, Ibsen, etc.) to Whitman suddenly roll on our backs with our face towards China and the Chinese. Charmed by their pictorial, suggestive loveliness we no longer hear the mighty voices of the past. (*Essays* 4)

Imagism, Toomer contends, is "so fascinated by the gem, by its outward appearance, by its external form, that the spirit behind the gem is not perceived." Fortunately, Toomer continues, imagism will not prevail; its view of poetry is a false one. "Overnight," he concludes, "our voice and our hearing have not shrunk into an eye." Sidestepping Toomer's orientalism—the opium-den-like repose of those charmed by Chinese gems—I want to focus on his contrast between an ahistorical "pictorial . . . loveliness" and the "mighty voices of the past," for here we will begin to uncover his alternative historical logic, one that is not content to rest either with the synchrony I have been describing or with the past that the auditory unearths but rather turns to an unspecified future politics based on auality, on "that sound which," as Fred Moten argues, "both never arrives and goes past home . . . directed towards a future politics that exists as a function of such non-arrival" (323).

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The irruption of this futurity, based on the past and remaining crucially "unheard," occurs most clearly in the story "Fern," where the object of the narrator's desires resists him through a haunting kind of singing. "Fern" begins in what could be an impersonal mode—"Face flowed into her eyes"—were it not for the introduction of the first person in the fourth sentence: "I follow the curves of her profile, like mobile rivers, to their common delta" (16). As so often in *Cane*, we encounter here a naturalized female figure who is the desired object for men "everlastingly bringing her their bodies." Fern neither refuses nor accepts their advances. Her eyes

sought nothing—that is, nothing that was obvious and tangible and that one could see, and they gave the impression that nothing was to be denied. . . . Fern's eyes desired nothing that you could give her; there was no reason why they should withhold.

Fern, here, seems entirely passive. She desires nothing and is, as a consequence, the object of history, never its agent.

The narrator first sees Fern on her porch, where she was often found "resting listless-like on the railing . . . back propped against a post, head tilted a little forward because there was a nail in the porch post just where her head came" (17). "[A]t first sight of her," he tells us, "I felt as if I heard a Jewish cantor sing. As if his singing rose above the unheard chorus of a folk-song." One evening he approaches her, suggests they go for a walk through the canebrake, and sitting down under "a sweet-gum tree," takes her in his arms "[f]rom force of habit" (19). Uncharacteristically, Fern resists him:

She sprang up. Rushed some distance from me. Fell to her knees, and began swaying, swaying. Her body was tortured with something it could not let out. Like boiling sap it flooded arms and fingers till she shook them as if they burned her. It found her throat, and spattered inarticulately in plaintive, convulsive sounds, mingled with calls to Christ Jesus. And then she sang, brokenly. A Jewish cantor singing with a broken voice. A child's voice, uncertain, or an old man's. Dusk hid her; I could hear only her song. It seemed to me as though she were pounding her head in anguish upon the ground. I rushed to her. She fainted in my arms.

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Preceding this conclusion, the narrator describes a strange feeling that “things unseen to men were tangibly immediate.” “It would not have surprised me,” he writes, “had I had vision,” for “[w]hen one is on the soil of one’s ancestors, most anything can come to one.” Fern’s tortured singing thus bears some relation to the narrator’s ancestors and “things unseen.” And in fact Fern too is literally unseen, hidden by the dusk, discernible only by her song—just as the old folk song she recalls for the narrator remains “unheard,” both present and absent. The ghostly presence of a past rooted in pain thus erupts in the convulsions of Fern’s burning, anguished body.¹⁸

As in the review of Aldington’s book, the mighty voices of the past break through the pictorial loveliness of Toomer’s pastoral mode. Crucially, this voice is described as that of a Jewish cantor. There is, then, a gap between interior and exterior; Fern’s interiority is not adequately represented by her exterior appearance. Aurality here escapes the visual logic of racial classification—the imagined homology between exterior and interior—allowing for the construction of an identity that is multiple, we might even say miscegenated.

Fern’s song—as an old man’s, the remnants of an old world; as a child’s, the sign of the new—represents precisely that turn to a potentially rejuvenating past that we have called primitivism, or the “modernist production of blackness,” but the text, turning from the visual to the auditory, does this in such a way as to elude the narrator’s full comprehension. The rural subject here preserves a certain undecidability, resisting the artistic subject’s desire to capture her fully in his artistic representation.

In its undecidability—her song is both past and present, heard and unheard—this figure echoes a similar moment in W. E. B Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*. That book begins with sight—Du Bois is marked in his otherness by the glance of a white schoolmate—and as Shamoon Zamir observes, “closes with Du Bois *listening* to the voices singing the spirituals” (196), sounds of the past laying claim to the present. Zamir continues:

Confronted by the articulate knowledge of suffering embodied in the songs, Du Bois cannot sustain either the detached observational stance of the social scientist or the political narrative of a superior leadership pulling the primitive black masses into modernity. (171)

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In this way, Du Bois “does not master the songs but is sent into the world by them” (199). The songs, moreover, are both unknown and known. They “came out of the South unknown to me,” Du Bois writes, “and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine” (155). And this same structure is repeated, as Du Bois transcribes the “heathen melody” of his “grandfather’s grandmother,” which has “traveled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music” (157). In this knowing but not knowing Du Bois manages to preserve the autonomy of the subject he would represent. The past projects itself into the future not as something fully known but as something open-ended, just as the song resists being reified as a transparent representation of the “primitive black masses.” Thus the inaccessibility of the past is not, as Ford and others have argued, best understood as revealing the impossibility of connecting to an authentic folk past but rather as an autonomy by which that past might persist as the grounds of some future yet to be realized.¹⁹

If Du Bois here refuses the mastery of the “observational stance of the social scientist,” then Toomer similarly rejects his observational stance as a representing artist, a stance directly parodied in “Box Seat.” Dan Moore takes his seat in the theater and observes

a portly Negress whose huge rolls of flesh meet about the bones of seat-arms. A soil-soaked fragrance comes from her. Through the cement floor her strong roots sink down. They spread under the asphalt streets. Dreaming, the streets roll over on their bellies, and suck their glossy health from them. Her strong roots sink down and spread under the river and disappear in bloodlines that waver south. Her roots shoot down. Dan’s hands follow them. Roots throb. Dan’s heart beats violently. He places his palms upon the earth to cool them. Earth throbs. Dan’s heart beats violently. He sees all the people in the house rush to the walls to listen to the rumble. A new-world Christ is coming up. Dan comes up. He is startled. The eyes of the woman dont belong to her. They look at him unpleasantly. (65)

This woman represents, for Dan, the African American’s rootedness in the Southern past. The woman, though, does not recognize herself in Dan’s vision, looking at him unpleasantly from eyes that are no longer hers. Again Toomer discovers the violence of the pastoral: Dan’s desire—or his

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effort to remake this woman into the image of his desire—refuses her interiority, removes her from herself and reduces her to a symbol.

Cane's project, the collection of folk specimens from the rural South, then, has something in common with that of Du Bois's social scientist. Especially considered in light of Toomer's letters, that project emerges as an artistic production of blackness analogous to the legislative production of blackness of the Reconstruction era—through its similar effort at surveillance and classification it consistently undermines its own classificatory impulse through a process of historicization. The text represents, that is, the arrogance of an artistic subject whose gaze seeks to dominate the recalcitrant material world, the same regime of visibility that undergirds the logic of passing in *Plessy v. Ferguson*; its migrating tropes continually seek to undo the violence it reads as constitutive of the artistic process. *Cane* thus uses the fetish of race, represented as the construction of the primitive by an outside subject, to undermine the very system of representation—the logic of visibility and self-legislating subjectivity—that underwrites the binary logic of racialized subjectivity.

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Cane, then, through its persistent critique of its own desire for what we might call the black authentic, describes formally a gesture of renunciation that Toomer would later perform explicitly, when he rejected both the term *passing* and the process of racialization itself. "In my own experience among the racial groups," he wrote in the 1928 essay "The Crock of Problems,"

I have not had the psychological state which obtains when one "passes" or tries to pass. I have never tried to pass because I have never had to try. I have simply gone and lived here and there. I have been what I am. (*Essays* 58)

Toomer here claims a kind of immediacy; he has not made a conscious choice but has simply presented himself to the world, which has responded in its own terms, imagining him alternately as "an Englishman, a Spaniard, a Dutchman, a Cuban, a South American, a Russian, a Japanese, an American Indian, a Hindoo, an Egyptian, a Frenchman" (*Reader* 99–100). Toomer's personal experience, then, suggested to him the inadequacy of the visual as a means of understanding identity and led to a subsequent

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decoupling of the external from the internal. For if his exterior produced such strikingly different classifications, it seemed not to have represented any definitive essence, a fact that made problematic his participation in any social group that might be defined by such an essence.²⁰

Indeed, in the idea that the individual represents some larger social unit Toomer sees the very premise of racial passing: "The attempt to pass . . . signifies an absence of a view of the country as a whole, the presence of the belief that the majority group is all of America and that it holds the advantages of privilege and superiority" (*Reader* 97). Whites here stand in for the entire nation, defining the ostensibly universal, but while Toomer rejects this version of universality, he does advocate for passing in a different sense: "From another point of view it could be held that passing is one of the means by which America is becoming America, in the sense that the majority group will in time absorb all minority groups."

Toomer does not here say whether the majority group will be altered by this absorption, and it is difficult to disentangle the two senses of *passing*. Absorption might allow the fulfillment of passing in the first (usual) sense, but in Toomer's second sense passing opposes the view that the majority constitutes "all of America." Instead, it aims for what he elsewhere calls "a new race in America," one "differing as much from white and black as white and black differ from each other" (*Reader* 105)—a "race" produced, as he imagines it, by miscegenation. Writing from within a climate of cultural nativism, Toomer uses *passing* to rewrite the fears articulated in such works as Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*. Far from representing a threat to the nation, miscegenation here points to the possibility of a new universal form of American identity, one that Toomer hopes will evade the either/or of racial identification.

As Hartman has argued, the fear of miscegenation was expressed through the policing of marriage and sexuality. Toomer's emphasis on biological mixing, then, represents a literalization of the familial metaphors through which such contiguous terms as *nation* and *race* were consistently imagined in nativist discourse.²¹ But this literalization occurs in reverse. Rather than reaching back to the nation's existing "traditions and customs," Toomer's "nation as family" looks toward the future. The nation will *become* a family—and in this way become a true nation—through the creation of a kinship more real than custom.²²

For Toomer, though, this kinship will extend beyond national boundaries and involve the entire human race. This vision was shaped by a

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mystical experience in 1926, when, as he wrote in "The Experience," he reached a "cosmic vantage point" (*Reader* 43), discovered the "Life behind labels," and became, for a time, a "being in Being" (41).²³ "It seemed," he writes, in a description that sounds quite close to the one Fanon describes in the "Fact of Blackness," "I was being taken apart, unmeshed and remeshed. I seemed to become malleable and flowing" (34).²⁴ Though the experience begins internally, Toomer "had not started it" (33) and indeed "was not the center of this working in any way. Not the source, not the main objective. Not subject, not object. I was as if decentered, off to the side as a spectator" (35). Transcending the "I"—one of "the most strategic factors of a man's life" (40)—Toomer finds himself "connected with [his] roots and source" (39). He soon returns to his body, but with a crucial difference: "[My body] was becoming . . . an integral part of me. It was becoming . . . an instrument of my being—a means of contact, not a confinement, an ability, not a liability" (53). Altered too is his understanding of others: "Observing the passersby, I saw them as earth-beings. . . . People were people, stripped of the labels and classifications they foist on each other. . . . Each character was just that character. Yet, as unmistakably, each and all were of the one kind, the kind called human" (59–60).

What Toomer here discovers, in direct contrast to Fanon, who found only his own limited embodiment, is universal kinship: precisely the condition to which Fanon's essay, according to Weate, ultimately points.²⁵ "I knew," he asserts of a man on the street, "that he and I were kin . . . because kinship is the fundamental relationship between things" (74). If everyone were able to "rise above the earth and become universal" (45), they would understand that kinship is "woven . . . into the very fabric of our essential existence . . . All men, as being, are kin" (74). The result would be an overturning of the values of society: "Man's bondage to his belly would be broken. Broken too would be his slavery to the commerce and the institutions that thrive on that bondage" (63).

Now, it is clearly this type of language that leads critics to read Toomer's later work in stark opposition to *Cane*. "The Experience" does seem invested in a form of universal subjectivity that would deny the particularity of blackness—*Cane*'s consistent object of exploration. And yet "The Experience" is more complex than this view allows, moving from particularity to universality to their synthesis in an integrated form of bodily subjectivity. In doing so, it gathers together several terms under its critical eye: the centered subject, the bondage of the capitalist system,

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and the commodification of social relationships premised on rigid classifications. And this classification is fundamentally visual: "Men as bodies are separate, but not as separated as they appear to the eye" (74). Toomer here connects the visual logic of racial self-possession to the objectification of others, and in doing so deconstructs the forms of subjectivity upheld by *Plessy v. Ferguson* and by passing itself. For in "The Experience" Toomer can hardly be called "self-legislating." He is barely there at all.

By articulating the universal in terms of kinship, Toomer underlines the role of miscegenation in his vision of the future. But miscegenation, he maintains, will not eliminate particularity. Indeed, for Toomer, individual particularity emerges only by first stripping the body of its labels and classifications, the social relations that I have argued are applied to the racialized body by the legislative production of blackness. Only then can the body become the expression of both the individual's uniqueness and its universality, a relationship that can only occur, it seems, once the falsely universalized conception of race has been overcome. For the fetish of race cloaks the particular in the guise of the universal—defining the nation as a whole in terms of a single group, fashioning a universal subjectivity in the image of white America—through the articulation of kinship, the affective ties of social custom undergirding American segregation. "The Experience" thus alters Toomer's mode of seeing others, as he transcends the logic of visual legibility that obscures our universal kinship behind the particular kinship of racialized subjectivity. And, crucially for my reading of *Cane*, the Experience is described as a discovery of roots—the very word Toomer used to describe *Cane*'s exploration of the rural South. Roots, that is, are not located in the rural South, a region whose charming folk culture is held in place by a regime of violence and oppression, but rather in the universal, decentered subject formation that Toomer outlines in "The Experience"—a form of subjectivity arrived at after the specific form of racialization deconstructed in *Cane*.

"The Experience" is not, then, a text of passing in the traditional sense but rather in the sense theorized in *Cane*, where passing involves the entire race of slaves passing away into a fully miscegenated future. By focusing on the slaves' songs rather than on the slaves themselves, Toomer's text turns away from the visual, with its reifying and racializing logic, to the auditory, both to preserve its ties to the past and, more importantly, to project itself into a future that might unseat the reified link between interior and exterior, a future prefigured at the close of *Cane* in the closet drama "Kabnis."

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The penultimate section "Kabnis" begins in Toomer's pastoral mode:

Night, soft belly of a pregnant Negress, throbs evenly against the torso of the South. Night throbs a womb-song to the South. Cane and cotton-filed, pine forests, cypress swamps, sawmills, and factories are fecund at her touch. Night's womb-song sets them singing. Night winds are the breathing of the unborn child whose calm throbbing in the belly of a Negress sets them somnolently singing. (105)

Once again Toomer roots his narrative amid the songs of slavery, but here at the end, those songs are evoked by the "breathing of the unborn child." They emerge, that is, not from the past but from an open future. As Toomer's text turns from the visual to the auditory, such a future is opened by songs that, like Du Bois's, are not fully heard, are known but not known. Toomer's migration, then, is subtle, and synchronous with the rural world it presents in all its multicolored undecidability. Confronting the rural South, *Cane* aims to do justice both to its violent legacy and to the possibility of a better future. In its form, *Cane* represents the miscegenated world it discovers as well as the one it hopes to bring into being.

Notes

1. The work of Marianna Torgovnick is, of course, the locus classicus for discussions of primitivism. See also the essays in Elazar Barken and Ronald Bush's *Prehistories of the Future*. Early critics praised *Cane* for its presentation of the "matchless beauty of the folk-life of the southern Negro" (qtd. in Toomer, *Cane* 166) and saw in it Toomer's desire to "make contact with his hereditary roots" (173). Contemporary critics eschew this rhetoric but remain invested in Toomer's search for community. Susan Edmonds, for instance, has recently argued for Toomer's refusal to follow his primitivist contemporaries' view of "undomesticated blackness" as a "positive repository of sexual and artistic freedom" (141) but still describes his investment in "the tradition of African American folk song" (150) as a site of communal meaning. A similar argument is made by Jennifer Wilks, who argues that the "tension between community and creation informs African diasporic modernisms differently than their French and Anglo American counterparts" (802). While each of these arguments is insightful, neither addresses what I argue is the basic impulse of the text: not the desire, however nuanced, to connect with an African folk community but rather the framing of that desire as itself constitutive of a certain modern (and modernist) problematic.

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2. The great merit of Ford's book is to disclose the constitutive tension in *Cane* between nostalgic primitivism and the realities of the world it attempts to depict and, furthermore, to locate this tension in the volume's competing genres. In doing so, she manages to resist the easy divide between North and South, finding that the lyricism negated by the violence of the South is nevertheless upheld as a desired solution to the sterile land of the North. In contrast to this reading, I turn my attention away from the diachronic movement from rural to modern to the synchronic space in which both the seemingly rural South and the supposedly modern North exist. The South cannot be viewed as the North's prehistory—even as something inaccessible, or present only in the form of negation—but rather as a constitutive aspect of the contemporary North. *Cane* does not, in my view, stage the failure of its poetry's ability to recover a vanishing past but rather frames and critiques this entire problematic.

3. To recap the history of *Cane* criticism would require a consideration of, at minimum, the relationship between African American literary texts and a view of American modernism that failed to recognize its own racialization, as well as an understanding of how the separation of these supposedly distinct realms of cultural production was upheld by the conceptual distinction between aesthetic innovation and political engagement. Scholarship of the last fifteen years—including important work by Michael North and Walter Kalaidjian, as well as recent books by Patricia E. Chu and Kevin Bell—has worked to overturn this divide. Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* remains the best account of the interests involved in maintaining the various divides within the field of early twentieth-century American verse. For excellent summaries of the twists and turns of Toomer criticism see Rachel Farebrother, particularly pages 503–08, and Ford, especially chapter 1.

4. Scruggs and VanDemarr accurately sum up what is, with the important exception of Ford, a kind of critical consensus, arguing that “although by the end of 1923 Toomer was on his way to embracing Gurdjieffism, this future choice is largely irrelevant to *Cane*'s meaning” (4). My point is not to return Gurdjieff to the center of Toomer studies, as scholars such as Jon Woodson and Rudolph P. Byrd have done, but rather to argue against a sharp distinction between the ideological content of *Cane* and the later work. For Ford's argument, which finds the later work to be the logical extension of the earlier book's defining critique of lyric's efficacy, see chapter 5 of *Split-Gut Song*. Mark Whalan has helpfully pointed out to me that class, a term present in Toomer's early journalism, almost entirely drops out in his Gurdjieffian phase, and that this might, in fact, be the key distinction between the two periods of his career. While a consideration of class remains outside the scope of this essay, this suggestion seems exactly right and a subject for further investigation.

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5. Critics have rarely seen the situation as clearly as Morrison does. As George Hutchinson notes, "Critics routinely ignore Toomer's idea that, as 'black' is to 'white' identity, the 'American' identity (in Toomer's sense) is to the 'black/white' identity" ("Jean Toomer and American Racial Discourse" 228). Kathleen Pfeiffer similarly asserts that "[t]he critical predisposition to read Toomer only through the very rubric he most vehemently rejected best illustrates the central paradox of America's racial discourse" (91). Neither critic, however, addresses Toomer in the context of modernism, as I will do in this essay.

6. Pamela L. Caughie, arguing against the idea that "identities [are] bounded, like territories," understands "identity as dynamic, more like a wave, a transfer of energy from point to point, than like the transfer of land" (400). She is thus able to argue against Marianna Torgovnick's linkage of primitivism and imperialism, using "passing to name those practices by which we try to refuse the identities that have been historically offered to us, and that continue to structure our responses even as we seek to disavow them" (404). Similarly, Gayle Wald claims that passing works "only because race is more liquid and dynamic, more variable and random, than it is conventionally represented to be within hegemonic discourse" (6). I should acknowledge that both critics' arguments are subtle and display an awareness of the limits of passing's subversive effects even as they pin their hopes on these effects.

7. Throughout nearly all his work, letters included, Toomer did not put apostrophes in his contractions. Here the *sic* is part of the letter as it appears in Turner's edition of *Cane*.

8. See Kathleen Pfeiffer's work in particular.

9. Early criticism of the book tended to read this "true self" in racial terms, even if it couched the conversation in the literary critical categories of S. P. Fullinwider's 1966 essay "Jean Toomer: Lost Generation, or Harlem Renaissance?" This divide has been dismantled in recent years by scholars such as George Hutchinson, Mark Whalan, and Werner Sollors, who have demonstrated the crucial black-white interactions that took place in the period, particularly around the Young American modernist group, of which Waldo Frank, an important influence on Toomer, was a member.

10. Thus Darwin T. Turner argues that "Woman is heart and intuition whereas Man is mind and logic. An appropriate relationship of Man and Woman, therefore, fuses the separate entities into a functioning totality" (127). Similarly, John M. Reilly describes the contrast between the "spontaneous feeling of the characters" and the "artificial creations of society" (316). Various forms of this argument can also be seen in the essays on *Cane* in Therman O'Daniel's collection *Jean Toomer: A Critical Evaluation*.

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11. A host of thematic echoes also tie the first and second sections of the book together. The young girl in "Avey," for instance, finds herself admired at an early age, in much the same way as the ripening Karintha. "Theater" inverts the dynamic of "Esther" when the passionate Dorris tries to woo the repressed John, who "wills thought to rid his mind of passion" (53). And "Bona and Paul" illustrates the complicated ways in which racial difference creates desire, in language strikingly similar to that of "Blood-Burning Moon," though without the latter's violent end. For a thorough discussion of the migration of tropes in *Cane* see Charles-Yes Grandjeat.

12. Ford reads this passage differently, but in a way that supports my claim for synchrony (a point she does not make). She writes: "In one breath [Toomer] associates simple forms with the South and complex ones with the North, but in the next breath he reverses those associations" (5).

13. Something similar to this process is described by Griffin when she argues that "we the reader are the migrants of the text. It is our consciousness which immediately confronts the Northern metropolis" (65). Nevertheless she argues that *Cane* "strive[s] to be [a] site of the ancestors" (67).

14. Kodat, for instance, makes an eloquent argument, largely compatible with my own, about the way *Cane* links aesthetic and political dominance, but she does so by consistently referring to "the universalizing ambition of modernism and its potentially dominating, repressive effect on the black subject" (6). My reading refuses such a clear opposition between the African American subject and modernist forms of representation, instead seeing in modernism the very self-reflexivity for which Kodat praises Toomer. For a historically grounded reading of modernism's utopian desires see Perry Anderson.

15. This description is ubiquitous in discussions of the early modern Petrarchan tradition. See for instance Nancy J. Vickers. Both Richard Eldridge and Karen Ford have connected the poem to the blason, though Eldridge focuses primarily on "Face."

16. Ford makes the interesting claim that the poem depicts an African American woman, whose "distinctive beauty burns until its blackness is transformed by death to whiteness" (53). In my view, the careful placement of *as* in the final line, comparing "her slim body, white" to "the ash / of black flesh after flame" makes the woman's race clear.

17. Walter Benn Michaels makes a related argument in a brief reading of the poem, reading it as a "narrative of the origins of racial difference, a narrative in which white bodies are depicted as the consequence of violence against black bodies" (62). If this is so, Michaels continues, then the poem is a "critique of

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racial difference" and is thus continuous with Toomer's later works. Michaels abandons this possibility, though, as he turns to the discourse of "roots" that has so often dominated Toomer criticism, a move that allows him to fit Toomer into his nativist modernist paradigm. For a full discussion of the poem, see Michaels 61–64.

18. In a similar vein, Charles Scruggs argues that

What truly shocks the garrulous narrator of "Fern" is not his failed romantic encounter with Fern but his encounter with history through Fern: in her mystical trance, she becomes a conduit for all the anguished voices of the diaspora. (80)

The ghost, represented powerfully in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, has been a productive trope for thinking through the simultaneous presence and nonpresence of the slave past. Of the many texts to treat this idea one of the most helpful is Jenny Sharpe's *The Ghosts of Slavery*. The image of Fern sitting on the porch, leaning against the nail, also, I think, evokes the nightingale, who in some accounts continually renews her wound. Her song, then, is the expression of this continual pain.

19. Ford argues that Toomer picks up on Du Bois's "correlation between African Americans and song" (22), a link that is then replicated in his critique of imagism. In each case, Toomer associates the auditory qualities of verse with the "spirit and emotion" (51) of the African American past, with which his various doubles fail to connect. In contrast, by reading the investment in the auditory as a critique of the visual politics of racialization, I locate the auditory in a future that might be free of the domination the text discloses in the heart of visual representation. Inaccessibility, then, is a mark of that past's independence from the desires of the present-day subject, desires that seek to relegate old songs to the inaccessible past.

20. No doubt those whose exteriors do not generate such multiple readings are unlikely to experience the world in this manner. There is, to be sure, much that is naive about Toomer's view. I think, however, it is worth trying to think through the matter on Toomer's own terms before we dismiss it or too easily assimilate it to positions we have rejected a priori.

21. This rewriting of both race and nation as family is most famously examined by Michaels in *Our America*. Though critics such as those in the *Modernism/Modernity* panel organized by Robert von Halberg have found fault with Michaels's arguments, the basic terms he introduces for nativism's self-articulation have been largely accepted. For an insightful critique that extends to Michaels's entire career, see Loren Glass.

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22. Toomer's claims here veer dangerously in the direction of contemporary conservative discourses that imagine twenty-first century America to be beyond racial classification and advocate a form of racial blindness—a “postrace” consciousness—that ignores the lived reality of racial difference. There is, to be sure, an idealist element in Toomer's language, but his hopes are built not on a denial of racial differentiation but on the fact of miscegenation—“The biological process has already taken place. And, despite sociological resistance, it will inevitably continue to take place” (*Reader* 108). He consistently speaks of this new race in the future tense: “the results of my life, what I call my Americanism, perhaps this will be typical of people years hence” (*Reader* 100).

23. The text here is from “The Experience,” part of the unpublished autobiography “From Exile into Being” which Toomer worked on from 1937 to 1946 (*Reader* 33–76). Rusch's selection in *A Jean Toomer Reader* is taken from the first 102 pages of this work. “From Exile into Being” is one of at least five autobiographies Toomer left unfinished.

24. Toomer's experience here recalls Fanon's description of his response to a child calling out “Look, a Negro!”: “I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self” (109).

25. Weate argues that according to Fanon, “the only past that is legitimate for the purposes of freedom is a *universal* past” (178).

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“Madame Bovary, c’est moi!”:

Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* and Sexual “Perversion”

Eric Berlatsky

Published first in England in 1984, Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* remains the author’s most cited, and perhaps most read, novel. Its attraction to critics and readers lies secondarily, perhaps, in its psychological realism, its investment in the story of Geoffrey Braithwaite’s troubled relationship with his wife Ellen, and the knowledge it imparts about the great French author Gustave Flaubert. Its primary interest may lie in its clever metafictional denaturalization of the realistic plot. Simultaneously a biography of Flaubert, an undermining of any lingering faith in historiographic objectivity, and a contemporary English love story, *Flaubert’s Parrot* garnered substantial critical attention as an instance of the breed of postmodernism that Linda Hutcheon labels “historiographic metafiction” (xiv). Critical approaches to the novel, and to Barnes’s oeuvre in general, have since hewn fairly narrowly to two well-trodden paths. The first treats Barnes’s work under the rubric of psychological realism, treating formal experimentation and self-reflexivity as by-products of character or authorial psychology. The second adopts Barnes as an exemplar of aesthetic postmodernism, particularly a kind of apolitical postmodernism that may interrogate and undermine historical and philosophical reality but is little influenced by, or has little impact on, the sociopolitical order of the day. Not coincidentally, as critical attention in the past twenty-five years has turned ever more resolutely toward the holy trinity of race, gender, and class, Barnes criticism has been less voluminous than criticism of many of his contemporaries who are easily read under these auspices.¹ Barnes is

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in danger of becoming critically passé because of his link to an aesthetic postmodernism that is misread as insufficiently political for the current critical climate.

While Barnes's most recent novel, *Arthur and George*, dips a cautious toe into postcolonial waters, the majority of his work engages the less exotic other of France, the suburban middle class, and that most passé of romantic/sexual institutions, marriage. When, in 1990, Martin Amis scornfully noted that "the typical English novel is 225 sanitized pages about the middle classes" (qtd. in Elias 19), he may as well have been referring to his friend/protégé/rival Barnes, whose work, especially at that early stage of his career, tended to be slim and focused firmly on white, bourgeois, married (or formerly married) English couples.² Although rarely "sanitized," Barnes's work may seem increasingly out of touch with the multiethnic or sexually ambiguous "new England" of recent authors such as Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips, Timothy Mo, Zadie Smith, Jeanette Winterson, Caryl Churchill, Angela Carter, et al. While Barnes cannot justifiably be called conservative, his consistent treatment of white bourgeois marriage in *Metroland*, *Before She Met Me*, *Staring at the Sun*, *Talking It Over*, *Love, Etc.*, and of course *Flaubert's Parrot*, no doubt contributes to his relative lack of critical attention. It is true that many of the above-named authors have also been labeled postmodern at various times, but it seems that they are more easily adopted into alternative camps as well. Rushdie, Mo, and Phillips are easily seen as politically important writers of race and immigration, Winterson and Carter address feminist and queer concerns, and Smith, Kureishi, and Churchill have the critical good fortune of falling into both camps.

I do not wish to recoup Barnes's work here by arguing for a return to the aesthetic and the philosophical at the expense of the political. Rather, I wish to suggest that Barnes has more in common with his more flamboyant contemporaries than critics have typically noticed. To wit, the white, bourgeois, heterosexual veneer of Barnes's work, and especially *Flaubert's Parrot*, is just that, a veneer, and the novel consistently undercuts, questions, and reveals it as false or, at the very least, tenuous. This is particularly the case where gender and sexuality are concerned. While the novel seems to function within a standard heterosexual logic and to trace the vicissitudes of an easily attributable and culturally disciplined Oedipal desire, a closer examination reveals that gender and sexuality are never stable in *Flaubert's Parrot*. Rather, through the juxtaposition of its

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two main plots—Geoffrey Braithwaite's search for the origins of Flaubert's parrot and his attempt to come to terms with his wife's infidelity and death—*Flaubert's Parrot* becomes a remarkably queer bird, one that introduces homosexuality, pedophilia, bestiality, promiscuity, and necrophilia as desires that cannot be repressed, marginalized, labeled, or categorized as perverse because of their metaphorical equivalency to the sanctioned sexual desire of heterosexual marriage. That is, *Flaubert's Parrot* uses and explores the interior of hegemonic social institutions not to support or understand them but to take them apart from the inside: to illustrate how they are always already queer.

Through a close look at the interaction between *Flaubert's Parrot's* sexual politics and its metafictional qualities, I will show how the two are inextricable, and how postmodernism renders "knowledge" and "reality" as historically produced participants in the politics of gender and sexual orientation. Indeed, I wish to suggest that a dismissal not only of Barnes but also of postmodernism itself as apolitical is to misread both. At the close of the essay, I will show that the emergence of *Flaubert's Parrot* at the same time as the AIDS crisis is no coincidence. The novel mirrors and in some ways anticipates the simultaneously emerging field of queer theory, a field deeply invested both in the material politics of sexuality and in the "withdrawal of the real" associated with the postmodern (Lyotard 79). By reading Barnes through the prism of some of the most important figures in queer theory (Foucault, Sedgwick, Butler) and by reading these figures through Barnes, I will emphasize the inextricability of the postmodern challenge to notions of knowledge and reality and the queer challenge to heteronormativity while encouraging a rereading of Barnes in a queer, and political, context.

"Lend us a quid. Give us your wife"

All of the available Barnes monographs begin by noting the heterogeneity of the author's literary output,³ but Matthew Pateman has correctly insisted that despite this variety, there are "concerns" that "recur" throughout Barnes's work (2). Foremost among these are "male friendship, sexual fidelity, obsession, betrayal, love, [and] the status of knowledge." Implicit in this claim is the distinction between male friendship and sexual fidelity. While male friendship can, of course, blend into the sexual, Pateman largely maintains the binary of masculine friendship as asexual, wholly

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distinct from the sexuality that occurs across genders. It might seem unfair to blame this heteronormative assumption on Pateman who, after all, merely tries to describe the situation as he sees it. However, this description inevitably leads to prescription, suggesting that masculine friendship and sexual fidelity are items that may coexist but not overlap. This assumption of heterosexuality, typical not only of Pateman but of most Barnes criticism, is not actually present in Barnes's work. In fact, Barnes more often suggests the continuity between male friendship and homosexuality along the homosocial spectrum elaborated most influentially by Eve Sedgwick.

Sedgwick argues that the "continuum between homosocial and homosexual" desire, far from being a stark division, is "potential[ly]" an "unbroken" one (*Between Men* 1–3). Her ground for this claim is an analysis of patriarchal institutions where men "promote the interests of men" economically and socially, revealing a preference for other men and their economic and material interests over and against those of women (3). She suggests that "men-promoting-the-interests-of-men" functions similarly to the feminist advocacy of "women-promoting-the-needs-of-women," which has led to the feminist slogans "we are all lesbians" and "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice."⁴ These slogans blend the need for female solidarity in material matters into sexual solidarity, insisting that to love women socially and economically must blend into sexualized relationships. If this is true for feminism, suggests Sedgwick, the same is true of patriarchy, where men's business of mutual self-promotion reveals or produces a "homosocial desire" that cannot be completely separated from the sexual. Barnes's treatment of homoeroticism is remarkably similar, particularly in *Talking It Over* and its sequel *Love, Etc.* These novels suggest a Barnes who is interested in subverting hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality, something he does even more radically in the earlier *Flaubert's Parrot*, as we shall see.

Talking It Over appears, on the surface, to be a simple love triangle between two male best friends, Stuart and Oliver, and the woman who marries them both, Gillian. The men are childhood friends who attended the same school, and after Stuart meets and falls in love with Gillian, Oliver eventually follows suit. The novel chronicles the slow seduction of Gillian by Oliver and their eventual marriage, leaving Stuart as the outsider in the new triangle. This simple plot summary reflects Pateman's model: Stuart and Oliver constitute the masculine friendship, while Gillian is unfaithful.

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The simplicity of this structure is thrown into question, however, by the intrusion of a woman named Val, who suggests that Pateman's categories are not so easy to separate. Val's claim that Oliver falls for Gillian precisely because "Oliver is queer for Stuart" (185) introduces the possibility that masculine friendship is not mere friendship but is rather, or at least also, sexual. Val bluntly asserts that "Oliver wants to fuck Gillian . . . because it's the nearest he can ever get to fucking Stuart." That is, because Oliver's "queer" desire for Stuart cannot be expressed, Gillian serves as a mediator, an object through which inappropriate same-sex desire may be triangulated. If this is the case, it may not be Gillian who betrays Stuart but Stuart who betrays Oliver, or vice versa.

Sedgwick, via Levi-Strauss, argues that women in a patriarchal culture principally serve as a means for men to expand their economic and social superiority. Women are exchanged for alliances, money, and power, serving as socioeconomic bargaining chips to be traded as a means of cementing homosocial masculine bonds. Because of the importance of marriage to this process, heterosexuality is most often culturally sanctioned, while homosexuality is marginalized and persecuted. That is, patriarchal reliance on women as "objects of exchange" (*Between Men* 26) can and often does contribute to the interdiction against same-sex desire that leads to homophobia and "compulsory heterosexuality."⁵ Homophobia and the misogynistic objectification of women as commodities can thus be linked together and traced back to the consolidation of patriarchal power (see also Rubin 180).

Sedgwick illustrates how this structure develops over the course of three centuries and is reflected in British literature since the seventeenth century, particularly in erotic triangles as discussed by René Girard (2–10). She writes:

in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: . . . the bonds of "rivalry" and "love" . . . are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent. (*Between Men* 21)

That is, in the continuum of same-sex desire, two male rivals for the love of a single woman can be seen to desire each other as intensely as either of them loves the woman. By this logic, it is the cultural suppression of homoeroticism, combined with the patriarchal traffic in women, that leads Stuart and Oliver to express their feelings toward each other through a third object, Gillian.

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Val's assertion of Oliver's queerness fits Sedgwick's account in more ways than one, however. Even beyond the notion of repressed homosexuality that Val suggests, Barnes introduces the dominant metaphor of love as economic exchange much as Sedgwick might have done. Indeed, the first meeting of Oliver and Stuart involves not love but economics, or perhaps love *as* economics. Oliver asks Stuart to "lend us a quid" (20), a phrase Stuart recalls when he uncovers the incipient affair between Oliver and Gillian. As a means of accusing Oliver of "stealing" Gillian, he repeatedly says "Lend us a quid. Give us your wife" (159), tacitly acknowledging the equivalency of the two requests. Here heterosexual love is a by-product of capitalism, itself linked, as Sedgwick suggests, to patriarchy. These "market forces" (160), as Oliver calls them, repress homoerotic desire and reduce women to objects of exchange.⁶

While Val's theory about the two men's queerness is only one of many theories in the novel that attempt to explain the love triangle, her brief appearances help to transform *Talking It Over* from a novel that encourages its readers to identify with or mimic the heterosexual affairs of its plot into one that encourages its readers to investigate and uncover what may lie beneath or alongside them. Even more interestingly, the novel suggests that Val's "radical" assertions about Stuart and Oliver's sexuality are not odd at all but are, rather, so obvious that they barely require hermeneutic inquiry. After unveiling her theory, Val realizes that her audience may have reached this conclusion already and addresses them accordingly: "Ok, you'd got there already. I'm not surprised" (185).

Here again, one of Sedgwick's claims about queerness is exemplified and elaborated. While Sedgwick and other queer theorists speak of a compulsory heterosexuality, a heteronormativity that paints any alternative sexualities as impossible or unspeakable, in fact the repression of such sexualities does little more than ineffectually obscure the queerness that permeates everyday life. That is, while heterosexuality may still be the only publicly and officially sanctioned sexual relationship, in fact "perversion," queerness, and homoeroticism are just as central to our daily experience. Indeed, in accordance with the deconstructive logic that Sedgwick partially adopts for *Epistemology of the Closet*, it becomes clear that heterosexuality cannot exist until it has an opposite to define itself against, and that to fully suppress the queer would be to eliminate the straight as well. In accordance with the Derridean logic of the supplement, homosexuality is always already there in any effort to define the heterosexual. Thus, to

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suggest that the straight is normal and the gay abnormal is to misunderstand both culture and language:

the ontologically valorized term A [heterosexuality] actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B [homosexuality]; . . . the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable [because] term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. (10)

In this conception it is impossible to call one kind of sexuality natural and the other perverse, since the second is already within the first as part of its definition. In classic deconstructive theory, then, the exposure of the centrality of homosexuality as a signifier that defines its opposite should contribute to the undermining of the "hygienic Western fantasy of a world without any more homosexuals in it" (42). Without homosexuality there are no heterosexuals, and therefore no oppression of one side of the binary by the other.⁷

Sedgwick appropriates this logic in an effort to deconstruct the gay/straight binary, particularly in discussing the relationship of same-sex desire to the literary canon. She asks, "Has there ever been a gay Socrates? Has there ever been a gay Shakespeare? Has there ever been a gay Proust?" and notes that these questions startle us not because they are shockingly transgressive but because they are "tautologies" (53). That is, the answer is so obviously yes that they merely bring attention to what we already know, reminding us that the central heterosexuality of our hegemonic culture is always precarious, that at its center is a queerness that cannot be easily suppressed. If Shakespeare's sonnets, written largely to a man, are the apex of love poetry in the Anglo American tradition, then love itself must always be permeated by desire that is not strictly straight. Sedgwick here suggests that same-sex desire is always central to our culture's self-definition, even as it seeks to deny this truth.

The same is true, as we have seen, in *Talking It Over*. Even as Val seeks to "out" the Stuart/Oliver relationship, she realizes that their social/sexual attraction for each other is obvious, even necessary, for the heterosexual love story of the novel to be fully articulated. While *Talking It Over* seems obviously to be a heteronormative narrative of competing affairs, it is *obviously* so only because mainstream society comes to the novel with a predisposition to see heterosexuality unless told otherwise. Val's brief

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comments push readers into the possibility of reorienting their reading. It makes obvious the queerness that was already there.

For this reason, it is surprising that what little gender-oriented criticism there is of *Talking It Over* critiques the novel for collaborating with Oliver and Stuart on the silencing of Val and of women generally. Both Erica Hateley and Richard Todd precede me in discussing the connection of the novel to homosocial bonding and the objectification of women. However, rather than reading the novel as an exploration and exposure of this cultural phenomenon, both suggest that it participates in reasserting "traditional patriarchal ideals of feminine silence, passivity, and objectification" (Hateley qtd. in Guignery 82; see also Todd 275–76). That is, these critics suggest that by showing the homosocial "traffic in women" and by silencing the few characters that draw attention to it, Barnes's novel somehow sanctions misogyny and homophobia. This assertion seems problematic, however, considering that any real effort to silence Val's reading would surely have entailed excluding her from the novel altogether. As soon as Val voices the latently erotic nature of the Stuart/Oliver relationship, the queer reading of the text cannot be silent. Instead, the reader watches as Stuart and Oliver attempt unsuccessfully to put the genie back in the bottle by literally gagging Val. This humorously erotic effort to repress homoerotic subtext only underlines what Val has already revealed: that there is something "queer" here that neither man wants to admit. Far from silencing homosexuality and female subjectivity, the novel reveals how these things are both produced and silenced by a cultural system revolving around homosocial bonds and competition.⁸

Barnes's inclusion of Val allows same-sex relationships to emerge as erotic, suggesting that what is purportedly hidden in the novel may come out of the closet. In a Foucaultian context, however, this outing is hardly liberating, since it seems to structure *Talking It Over* as a kind of confession where homosexuality is what is admitted and therefore known and understood. This is particularly possible given the structure of the novel as a series of first-person interviews or possible confessions. Foucault, of course, has influentially argued that sexuality has never been repressed in the psychoanalytic/Victorian sense. Rather, discourse about sex has been continually on the increase since the seventeenth century, forced out in a series of confessions. It is these discourses of confession, particularly medical/scientific discourses, that, far from liberating some natural sexuality previously repressed, have structured, controlled, disciplined, organized, and invented "sexuality."

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In Foucault's model, the knowledge of sexuality disseminated by scientists like "Campe, Salzmann . . . Kaan, Krafft-Ebing, Tardieu, Molle, . . . Havelock Ellis," and, of course, Freud, is actually a deployment of power that serves to define, locate, and control individuals as one of a series of "types" (63). "[I]t is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together," writes Foucault (100), and medical discourse wielded the tremendous power of sorting and categorizing people on the basis of their sexual activities, desires, or private preoccupations. Sexual desires, then, do not resist the prohibitions of discourse but are instead constituted by them. As such, the "confession" initiated by Val serves to bring us knowledge of the homoeroticism of the Stuart/Oliver relationship and therefore categorizes them as pathologically perverse, while it also concretizes and directs their sexual energies.

Talking It Over is not, however, so easily read as "disciplinary" in this sense, precisely because the status of knowledge in the novel is never assured. Val does not reveal a secret that is an irrefutable fact from which the novel builds and progresses. Instead, hers is merely one voice among many, a voice that is itself compromised by Val's previous relationships with both men. Indeed, the epigraph for the novel, "He lies like an eyewitness," suggests that none of the voices in the text can be trusted, unlike the discourse of truth that science supposedly provides. The novel, in fact, has no general narrator who adjudicates the utterances of its characters. Rather, each provides his or her own version of events, a multitude of subjective possibilities, but no "true" history. It is here that the novel is most clearly linked with Barnes's better-known works, *Flaubert's Parrot* and *History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. These novels undermine the possibility of knowing history or, for that matter, anything at all. As has not been generally acknowledged, however, Barnes's typically postmodern subversion of epistemology also has distinct ramifications for our understanding of gender and sexuality.

In *Talking It Over*, and throughout Barnes's work, the confession of homosexuality does not operate as a disciplinary confession of the truth but merely as one of a number of competing but irresolvable possibilities. Stuart and Oliver may be repressed homosexuals, but we do not *know* that they are, because the novel is structured as a series of unmediated monologues and because it thematizes the impossibility of total knowledge.⁹ This resistance to the knowledge/power continuum, particularly in terms of sexuality, is taken to even greater extremes in *Flaubert's Parrot*, where

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sexualities, far from being specified, separated, and categorized, all become versions of one another, suggesting that the “normal” and the “perverse” are not separable, and therefore that power administered on the basis of their separation is untenable.

Books and life/people and parrots

The queer subtext evident in *Talking It Over* is not easily transferred to *Flaubert's Parrot*, but the later novel's focus on “perversion” as a pervasive undercurrent in heteronormative society is instructive in reorienting readings of the earlier novel. Like *Talking It Over*, *Flaubert's Parrot* centers around a love triangle of sorts, between Braithwaite (the narrator), Ellen (his wife), and Flaubert (his literary obsession). It might be possible then to read *Flaubert's Parrot* in structurally similar ways. If Oliver's love for Stuart is suppressed, transformed into friendship, and rearticulated toward a more culturally appropriate outlet, then perhaps Braithwaite's desire for Flaubert is repressed, transformed into an obsessive author/reader relationship, and rearticulated toward a more appropriate heterosexual outlet: his wife. On the surface, however, this effort to map the later novel onto the earlier one seems absurd, if only because *Flaubert's Parrot* actively attempts to provide us with the precisely opposite interpretation. Braithwaite spends the entire book concealing, hedging, or obscuring the story of his relationship with his wife in favor of his pedantic excavation of Flaubert's life and work. Finally it is revealed that Braithwaite is avoiding discussion of Ellen because she had a series of sexual liaisons with other men, she attempted suicide, and he was eventually forced to end her life himself, thanks to her Not to Be Resuscitated order. These factors transform love for his wife into a trauma that needs to be actively repressed. In fact, it is suggested that Braithwaite's “rash devotion to a dead foreigner” (187) is merely a displaced desire to understand Flaubert in ways that he could never understand Ellen.

As Braithwaite acknowledges, “both her secret life [her sexual affairs] and her despair lay in the same inner chamber of her heart, inaccessible to me” (188), and he likewise confirms that his obsession with Flaubert is an effort to comprehend the things in his real life that are incomprehensible:

Books say: She did this because. Life says: She did this. Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't.

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I'm not surprised some people prefer books. Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never your own. (190–91)

Here Braithwaite's affection for Flaubert is clearly just a displacement, a love that can be contained and explained because it is located in books, while the reality of his relationship with Ellen cannot. Indeed, in a psychoanalytic model, Braithwaite's obsession with Flaubert can be decoded, quite obviously, as a neurosis. When appropriate love objects are traumatically removed, as occurs with Ellen's suicide attempt and death, it stands to reason that the unreachable desire will be repressed and sublimated in other directions, as in Braithwaite's obsession with Flaubert.¹⁰

From this fairly typical reading of the novel, *Flaubert's Parrot* seems resolutely heteronormative. The masculine love/desire for the most appropriate love object is seen as normal, while the (asexual) preoccupation with Flaubert is an unhealthy sublimation. Indeed, the whole novel could be seen as an exercise in working through this neurosis and arriving at a renewed sense of normal, and therefore heterosexual, subjectivity. Several critics have, in fact, read the novel in precisely this way. Ben Winsworth, for instance, argues in Freudian terms that Braithwaite finally moves from "mediating" his experience through Flaubert "*towards a fuller revelation and understanding of experience*" (179; Winsworth's italics). Emma Cox, conversely, uses psychoanalysis to suggest that Braithwaite does not adequately work through the trauma of his relationship with Ellen, always keeping himself at a distance from the reality of his experiences through Flaubert. Barnes himself, in a *Guardian* article, describes Braithwaite as someone who is "loaded down by . . . emotional blockage," who tells us "a load of stuff about Flaubert" because he is incapable of telling the truth ("When Flaubert Took Wing" par. 8). In the novel, Braithwaite offers that "Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead" (88).¹¹

These readings of the novel collaborate uncritically with Braithwaite's statements about the books/life dichotomy. They assume that the real story of the novel (or the latent/unconscious one) is the Braithwaite/Ellen relationship, repressed and replaced by the surface ruminations on Flaubert. Unlike the situation in *Talking It Over*, it is not the potentially homoerotic Braithwaite/Flaubert relationship that is repressed in favor of a more palatable heteronormative story. Rather, it is the "appropriate" sexual relationship (Braithwaite/Ellen) that is repressed in favor of a

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homosocial relationship that is configured as asexual. To abide by these psychological readings, however, is to ignore the very instability of the relationship of books to life that the metafictional content of the book insists upon. Likewise, to abide by the heteronormative notion that the heterosexual relationship is the real one, while those between men can only be social or literary, elides the unstable nature of gender in the novel. Indeed, the instability of the books/life binary is parallel to and constitutive of the gender instability.

Though Braithwaite asserts a seemingly impregnable binary between literature and life in the above quotation, the book continually encourages us to read this assertion ironically. First and most obviously, the person who utters it is merely a character in a novel: his claim that books do not explain his life is, in this way, incoherent. If books do explain the lives of the characters in them, then it is precisely his life that can be explained.¹² If his life is inexplicable, then books also fail to make their characters' lives "make sense," invalidating the books/life division that he asserts. Likewise, Gustave Flaubert is the figure that most represents the world of books here, a manifestly real person. To suggest that the real relationship is between Geoffrey Braithwaite and Ellen, while all of the literary pursuit of Flaubert is an example of psychological repression, seems, from this perspective, to be absurd. The real relationship, if there is one, must be between Julian Barnes and Gustave Flaubert.

Indeed, Barnes's fascination/obsession with Flaubert was not initiated in an effort to research and write *Flaubert's Parrot*. On the contrary, the novel emerged from a preexisting preoccupation that also extends long after the novel was written. Nearly half of *Something to Declare*, a 2002 book of essays, for instance, is devoted to Flaubert. Barnes suggests in *The Guardian* that Braithwaite's role in *Flaubert's Parrot* may have been grafted on belatedly ("When Flaubert Took Wing" par. 4–6), with the treatment of Flaubert deriving from Barnes's own experience. He had wanted to write something about Flaubert as early as age fifteen, but *Flaubert's Parrot* began in 1981, when he visited the "three main Flaubert sites in Rouen": "his statue in the . . . Place des Carmes," "the Flaubert museum at the Hôtel Dieu" (par. 4), and the remains of Flaubert's house at Croisset (par. 5). At the latter two locales, Barnes encountered two different versions of the original parrot used as a model for *Un Coeur simple*. This entire series of adventures is included in the novel with Braithwaite as Barnes substitute,

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but clearly the mystery of the parrots is at least as much Barnes's story as it is his character's.

Additional obstacles to seeing the Braithwaite/Ellen relationship as the real one become evident when the reader realizes that it is merely a thinly concealed copy of that between Emma and Charles Bovary in *Madame Bovary*. Like Charles, Braithwaite is a doctor who is betrayed sexually by his wife. That the Flaubert enthusiast lives out the plot of Flaubert's masterpiece may, in some ways, be an elaborate joke on the reader, though it is possible to interpret it psychologically by noting that Braithwaite's obsession with Flaubert may itself be engendered by the recognition of himself in *Bovary*. However, there are metafictional elements of the novel that exceed this psychological explanation. One is the shared initials of Ellen Braithwaite and Emma Bovary. Here Barnes slyly indicates that he has constructed the parallels between *Bovary* and *Parrot* independently of Braithwaite's recognition. It strains credulity, after all, within a realist psychological model, to suggest that Braithwaite searches for and marries someone with Emma Bovary's initials in the hopes of being betrayed by her at some point in the future. Likewise, when Braithwaite plays at being a "dictator of literature" (102), he explicitly forbids "novels which are really about other novels. No 'modern versions,' reworkings, sequels, or prequels" (105). At first, some readers may be inclined to nod their head and smile at this sensible critique of a disturbing recent trend in Anglo American letters. At the same time, it transpires that this book is precisely the kind of book that Braithwaite forbids. Again, this metafictional commentary foregrounds to the reader that he or she is reading a fiction, and thus to talk about the real psychology of its characters is a fool's game. Not only are Geoffrey and Ellen fictions, they are fictions based on, or copied from, other fictions. *Madame Bovary* may not explain the trauma of real life, but neither will *Flaubert's Parrot*, since it is, to some degree, merely a rearticulation of the former.

Keeping this in mind, one might invert the psychological interpretation provided by critics like Cox and Winsworth. Julian Barnes has an obsession with Gustave Flaubert. This is the real relationship that spawns the book; indeed, the twelve or so chapters (out of fifteen) devoted exclusively to Flaubert indicate quite obviously that the real concern of the book is Flaubert. In fact, we might read the belated grafting on of the Braithwaite/Ellen scenario as an effort to repress the intensity of the Barnes/

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Flaubert attraction. By implying that the real concern is something universal and palatable, like a heterosexual marriage gone awry, Barnes hides the obsessive nature of his relationship with Flaubert in plain view, like the homoeroticism in *Talking It Over*. Like the homosexual closet, it is an open secret: open because it permeates every page of the novel, secret because the book pretends that its real concerns are elsewhere.

This type of reversal is performed by William Bell, who suggests that the primary concern of the book is as a Flaubert biography, with the Braithwaite/Ellen storyline inserted merely to give due attention, as Francis Steegmuller does in the standard Flaubert biography, to Flaubert's famous assertion "Madame Bovary c'est moi!"¹³ Since Ellen Braithwaite is a tragic adulteress like Emma Bovary, the effort to understand her motivations and personality is a de facto attempt to understand Emma, which, given Flaubert's assertion about his identification with her, will lead to an uncovering of Flaubert's own core motivations or identity. According to Bell, in other words, the entire Braithwaite/Ellen plot is a displaced attempt (perhaps a triangulation) to understand Flaubert himself via the plot of *Bovary*, one of several attempts to grasp the "hidden self" (168) of Flaubert and to fulfill "the purpose of biography, *but in a different way*" (171; Bell's italics).

While Bell's reading inverts the readings of Winsworth, Cox, and others, it too sacrifices the crucial ambiguity in the art/life, male/female, and hetero/homo divisions that the novel evinces. Far from blurring the art/life barrier, as Barnes's novel itself does, Bell's reading merely reverses the terms of the standard reading. For Bell, the Geoffrey/Ellen relationship is not really at issue; the Barnes/Flaubert relationship is. The clear distinction between the two relationships remains: one superficial, the other deep. Likewise, the reading retains the distinctions between friendship and sexuality indirectly proposed by Pateman. If the Ellen/Geoffrey relationship merely serves the purposes of a biography of Flaubert, the Barnes/Flaubert relationship is the real one and comfortably falls into the realm of masculine friendship untouched by sexuality. Likewise, if the Geoffrey/Ellen relationship is the real one, then sexuality is at play, but it is not subversive, since it falls into heteronormative parameters. It is only if and when it becomes impossible to separate the primary from the secondary, the real from the false, the latent from the manifest, the heterosexual from

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the homosexual, that the text can become subversive or dangerous. It is, however, precisely this possibility upon which the novel insists.

Even disregarding its sexual content, the novel continually refuses to offer one interpretation as real and another as a displacement or imitation of the first. In chapter 2, three chronologies of Flaubert's life are presented, all factually accurate, but all implying radically different interpretations of these facts. We can read Flaubert's life as successful/triumphant, as depressing/lonely, or as a series of metaphors, mere displacements of their object of reference. We cannot decide, however, which one of the three is correct. Likewise, the parable of the parrots, initially given to us as a choice between two possible candidates, is irresolvable. In fact, a visit to Monsieur Andrieu reveals that the parrot used by Flaubert was returned to the museum in 1876. Only years later did its two competing homes ask for it to be returned. Both were given a choice from the fifty birds in the museum, using the story for guidance. In the intervening decades, however, it is quite possible that the original would have "got the moth" or "change[d] colour" (214), just as Flaubert's parrot may have been described in accordance with artistic exigency rather than fidelity to the supposedly real bird. For these reasons, Braithwaite must admit that "either of them could be the real one. . . . Or, quite possibly neither" (214).¹⁴

This revelation permeates the entire novel. When given choices of interpretations of the past, or of what is reality and what is mere appearance, it is always impossible to determine. In fact, the whole notion that one parrot could be the real one is placed into question long before this final revelation. Because of their capacity to repeat and approximate human speech (53–54), parrots are common symbols of imitation, and this parrot is already stuffed, an imitation of a living parrot, by the time it reaches Flaubert's desk. Even the assertion that a parrot cannot help but begin as an imitation is undermined, however, when Braithwaite relates the newspaper account of a man, Henri K, who becomes obsessed with a parrot and incessantly repeats "the name of his lost love" (55). Henri goes mad after the death of the parrot and begins acting like the bird, suggesting that even the real may become the imitation, or the imitation of the imitation. From all of this it becomes clear that trying to identify either Ellen or Flaubert as the real concern of the novel is impossible. We can choose either at any moment, just as we can choose either parrot, or neither, or both.

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“Madame Bovary c’est moi!”

Barnes’s novel succeeds not only in questioning our capacity to know the truth of history, or the relationship of art to life, but also in reevaluating sexuality in ways that are dependent upon, but not limited to, its critique of epistemology. The instability of the novel’s preoccupation with either Ellen or Flaubert as its primary concern is therefore, not surprisingly, also central to its treatment of the sexual. As discussed above, it slowly becomes apparent that the Braithwaite/Ellen relationship is a version of the Charles/Emma relationship in *Madame Bovary*, establishing a fairly simple equation: Braithwaite = Charles : Ellen = Emma. Flaubert’s famous phrase “Madame Bovary c’est moi!” complicates this equation, however, both on the level of the art/life binary and on the level of the hetero/homo binary, disseminating sexuality into a variety of non-normative “perversions” that refuse to be specified.

As Bell points out, the phrase “Madame Bovary c’est moi!” is itself an elucidation of the art/life binary. Flaubert’s obsession with style and preference for the literary over the sordid realities of everyday life have led some critics (Huyssens, Reed) and some modernists themselves to see him as one of the fathers of modernism. His pithy assertion, cited frequently in *Flaubert’s Parrot*, “I have always tried to live in an ivory tower, but a tide of shit is beating at its walls” (30), suggests a modernist aversion to the real bourgeois world of corruption and hypocrisy, and a preference for the “ivory tower” world of art or literature. Emma Bovary’s similar preference for the literary, in romantic novels and tales of heroism, leads to her downfall when she expects her real life to meet the standards of these tales. While Flaubert critiques her failure to distinguish the real from the fictional, he levels at least as much critique on the world itself and the “tide of shit” it perpetually raises against the realization of the literary ideal. For this reason, Bell notes that “Madame Bovary c’est moi!” is true in the “banal sense [that] a propensity to live in the imagination is Flaubert’s vice before it is Emma’s” (155). At the same time, with this phrase Flaubert identifies his real self with the Bovarian other, subverting his own attempt to separate the real from the artistic. If she is I, the artistic creation is the real. Oddly, Emma Bovary proves right about the interpenetration of the literary and the real, if Flaubert himself is to be believed. The logic of equivalence that the “c’est” of Flaubert’s utterance proposes dissolves the separation of the “ivory tower” from the “tide of

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shit." The two are equivalent, or at the very least inseparable, and the simple equation proposed above is expanded by one term: Geoffrey = Charles : Ellen = Emma = Flaubert.

This addition to the chain of people/characters/signifiers is hardly surprising in view of Braithwaite's own articulation of the similarities between his love of Ellen and his love of Flaubert. When he compares his two great passions, he notes how "real" love always wishes to know the worst about its object. It is for this reason, he intimates, that he cannot help but pursue the details of Ellen's affairs, depression, and attempted suicide (138–39). He then argues that "it's similar with books" (139) and that he "seek[s] the vice" of Flaubert as well. All of this solidifies the parallelism that he establishes when he asserts that "writers aren't *perfect* ... any more than husbands and wives are perfect" (76). Again, however, he offers one crucial distinction between books and life. With a "lover, a wife" the response to learning the worst is relief, since (post)modernity's attitude toward life is always one of irony and cynicism: "Life is as I thought it was: shall we now celebrate this disappointment" (139). On the other hand, he asserts that "With a writer you love, the impulse is to defend." This corroborates his claim that love for an author is "the purest ... form of love," since even authorial betrayal will not dissuade a reader from remaining faithful. That is, he suggests that writer/reader love is platonic, asexual and ideal. The novel itself, however, contradicts his division between romantic (hetero, sexual) love and its literary counterpart (potentially homo, asexual).

Braithwaite proposes that love for the author is pure, while love for a real person is always tainted by anger, jealousy, etc. Later, however, he characterizes his relationship with Ellen as the only "pure story" (180) in the book. This establishes continuity between his love for Flaubert and for Ellen precisely where he has been careful to claim a distinction. Likewise, he suggests that a reader who loves a writer will defend that writer from his or her critics even when betrayed, but will not extend the same courtesy to real lovers. In fact, however, while he spends an entire chapter defending Flaubert, he also defends Ellen from anticipated slights. He reveals that she was depressive, unfaithful, and suicidal, yet he is never accusatory or judgmental. Rather, he reasserts his love for her, offers possible explanations for her transgressions, and blames himself. He notes that perhaps she was "loved too much" and that she was a "good wife" (184). In addition, "She wasn't corrupted; her spirit didn't coarsen;

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she never ran up bills . . . she was honourable" (184–85). It is difficult not to see these claims as a defense of Ellen in much the same spirit as his defense of Flaubert.

The signifying chain of Geoffrey = Charles : Ellen = Emma = Flaubert thus becomes more and more evident, with the attraction to Ellen being a version of Braithwaite's (and Barnes's) literary attraction to Flaubert *and* the attraction to Flaubert being a version of the love for Ellen. The way the two relationships are not equivalent is, it might seem, purely sexual. Braithwaite's love for Ellen has a sexual dimension, while his attraction to Flaubert is, it seems, purely epistemological. Even this distinction, however, is blurred from the very beginning of the novel, where knowledge and sexuality are perpetually linked. When Braithwaite goes to Rouen in pursuit of Flaubertian knowledge, he describes his quest as being "randy for relics" (3), explicitly highlighting the intertwining of epistemological and sexual desire.

Likewise, Braithwaite's interest in the English governess Juliet Herbert, employed by Flaubert, is clearly sexual: he is eager to uncover a torrid affair implied in a Flaubert letter but never confirmed. Braithwaite imagines publishing an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* titled "Juliet Herbert: A Mystery Solved." The "mystery," or "secret" as Braithwaite also describes it, is, of course, "Gustave and Juliet's [sexual] relationship" (34), and the possibility of uncovering it "thrill[s]" him. As he notes, "all biographers secretly want to annex and channel the sex lives of their subjects," emphasizing the link between secrets and sexuality. Recent theorists of biography like William Epstein and Stacy Wolf argue that biography is inherently a pursuit of sexual knowledge and is frequently homoerotic in orientation. Epstein notes how Isaak Walton, John Donne's biographer, configures "the affinity of biographer and biographical subject as a lifelong friendship *between men* interrupted but not ended by death: '*though their bodies were divided, their affections were not*'" (220; Epstein's italics). Here the biographical act is a homosocial one that inevitably refers to masculine bodies that threaten to become sexualized. Likewise Stacy Wolf's pursuit of knowledge of her biographical subject, Mary Martin, becomes, as she self-consciously notes, "linked with [her] desire" (93), a desire specifically identified as "lesbian" (92).

Sexuality, of course, is one of very few things that people tend to keep secret or in the closet, and Braithwaite suggests that the revelation of previously concealed sexual information would "help me imagine even

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more exactly what Flaubert was like" (35), as if sexuality were the key to the mystery of human subjectivity, as Freud suggests. Foucault notes that in contemporary society, and particularly in a psychoanalytic context, "we demand that sex speak the truth . . . and we demand that it tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves" (69). That is, sex and knowledge are so intricately related that one is taken as the other, particularly where subjectivity is concerned. Indeed, Foucault argues that discourse (or knowledge) about sex actually determines and channels sexuality. And most obviously, the Hebraic scriptures deploy the word *know* to denote sexual intercourse ("Adam knew Eve"), linking personal, historical, and epistemological knowledge to sex (Leith 416–17). As Sedgwick notes, "'knowledge' and 'sex' become conceptually inseparable from one another" in Western culture (*Epistemology* 73).

Indeed, when Braithwaite articulates the impossible question of "how do we seize the past," he quite frequently adverts to "Gustave's sex life" (106), making his interest in another man's erotic life evident. As he points out, for years it was assumed that Flaubert's sexual experience was limited to an intermittent affair with the poetess Louise Colet. However, further investigation revealed a childhood/adolescent crush on his mother's friend Elisa Schlesinger, which was never consummated but nevertheless impacted all of his future relationships. From there "more letters come into view and the Egyptian journals" (106) revealing sexual liaisons not only with a multitude of actresses and prostitutes (including the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem) but also with his good friend and lookalike Louis Bouilhet and a variety of "Cairo bath-house boys." From reluctant monogamist, Flaubert is transformed into someone "ambi-sexual, omni-experienced," merely with new knowledge. As Braithwaite explains, however, even this new view of Flaubert is questionable: Sartre's biography of Flaubert, for example, declares the claims for homosexual liaisons with Bouilhet and the bathhouse boys "wishful thinking," a bourgeois conventionalist trying to see himself as unconventional. In the meantime, other Flaubertians have uncovered evidence that the relationship with Madame Schlesinger may have been consummated after all. Braithwaite's point (and Barnes's) is that full knowledge of the past is impossible, and even real physical acts can rarely be confirmed. Here the desire for knowledge blends into the sexual both because it is the desire for knowledge about sex and because knowledge is always tinged with the sexual.

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Braithwaite himself would likely deny any sexual dimension to his attraction to Flaubert, given his dislike of “the Auden-Spender-Isherwood crew (preaching socialism as a sideshoot to homosexual law reform)” (102).¹⁵ Indeed, it is possible to reject the link of epistemology to sexuality in *Flaubert’s Parrot* simply by noting that Braithwaite evinces curiosity about a variety of things about Flaubert that are not sexual. Among these are Flaubert’s attitude toward trains, his relative height as compared to his contemporaries, his fascination with animals of various kinds, and the historically variable color of red currant jam. Although it might be possible to link some of these to Flaubertian sexuality, this seems far from the primary concern of his investigations. However, it becomes hard to dismiss the sexual component of Braithwaite’s attraction to Flaubert when he ventriloquizes the role of Louise Colet. “Louise Colet’s Version,” is the only chapter in the novel where Braithwaite partially abandons his voice as storyteller/narrator and decides to imaginatively tell Flaubert’s lover’s story in the first person.¹⁶ In this moment we may imagine Braithwaite declaring “Louise Colet c’est moi!” transforming the character chain from Geoffrey = Charles : Ellen = Emma = Flaubert into a more evenly weighted Geoffrey = Charles = Louise Colet : Ellen = Emma = Flaubert. The addition of Colet is based on more than Braithwaite’s choice to speak from her perspective, however.

Certainly Colet is the closest thing Flaubert could be said to have had to a wife. They were in a more or less committed relationship for a fairly lengthy period of time (seven years with a three-year interruption) (*Flaubert’s Parrot* 18), and although both of them had affairs, Colet, at least in Braithwaite’s version, saw Flaubert as the love of her life and was hopeful that he would commit to her for the long term. As Braithwaite notes, Flaubert even allowed himself to fantasize about a marriage to Colet, despite his general skepticism and antagonism toward the institution. In one letter “He imagines their life together, their marriage, a sweet existence of mutual love and mutual companionship” (133–34). In a later letter he is less idealistic, “After we’d been happy, then we would have hated one another. This is normal” (134). The trajectory of these letters precisely mirrors *Madame Bovary’s* (and *Flaubert’s Parrot’s*). Emma’s romantic idealization of marriage is followed by her disappointment and finally her adulterous betrayal. This is paralleled by the Flaubert/Colet relationship, only reversed along gender lines; Colet idealizes the relationship as a “grand passion” between artistes that might rival that of “George Sand

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and Chopin" (157) but is inevitably disappointed and betrayed by a Flaubert who is uninterested in monogamous commitment. Like Braithwaite, she is "betrayed" by her "spouse," and like him, she wishes to know the worst, reading Flaubert's diaries and uncovering his ambisexual affairs.

The only difference between Colet's and Braithwaite's relationship to Flaubert seems to be sexual. Colet assures us that despite her quarrels with Flaubert, their sexual congresses were always enjoyable: "Whatever the battles that occurred between us, none of them was fought in the province of the night. There, we embraced by lightning; there, violent wonder lay entwined with soft playfulness" (155). Given Barnes's evocative style, it is easy to forget here that it is not Colet's voice we hear but Braithwaite imagining Colet (or Barnes imagining Braithwaite imagining Colet). The love Colet expresses is a version of Braithwaite's own, and even the sexual thrill expressed by Colet is a version of Braithwaite's own. It is possible, of course, to (hetero)naturalize this observation by recalling how Flaubert is always in some way Ellen to Braithwaite, and therefore Colet's sexual attraction and jealousy are merely glosses on Braithwaite's own marriage. Nevertheless, it is difficult to consistently make this hermeneutic transformation when Colet describes Flaubert's satisfaction in discharging his phallic "cannon" repeatedly into prostitutes, grisettes, and herself (156). In these somewhat graphic sexual images, Flaubert is the stereotypically active man, while Braithwaite as Colet cannot help but be the stereotypically receptive woman, or homosexual "bottom." That is, with the Colet chapter, Braithwaite imagines himself not only being married and sexually betrayed by Flaubert (things that can be displaced easily to Ellen), but also being sexually entered by him, an act less easy to reconcile in heteronormative terms. The division of the sexual love for Ellen from the literary or platonic love for Flaubert is inherently violated when Braithwaite becomes Louise Colet. In that moment, definitively, his love for Flaubert is sexual as well.

None of this is to suggest that *Flaubert's Parrot*, like Val's version of *Talking It Over*, is a tale of repressed homosexuality (Braithwaite/Flaubert) triangulated through a third female figure (Ellen). In fact, the novel is much queerer than that. Barnes slyly indicates the problem with the attempt to reduce the novel's sexuality to homoeroticism in the chapter titled "Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas," an alphabetical listing of terms connected to Flaubert and the received wisdom about them.¹⁷ For the letter *T* Braithwaite discusses transvestism, evoking three

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quotations from Flaubert indicating either a desire to be a woman or an identification of himself as female. "Madame Bovary c'est moi!" is merely the most famous of these quotations (178).¹⁸ Gendering Flaubert female, even metaphorically, again seems to make a heteronormative reading of the novel possible. Braithwaite loves Ellen and Flaubert, both hetero desires, in this version. But this attempt to make Flaubert a woman cannot stand, in view of the heading of Braithwaite's entry. Here he characterizes Flaubert as a transvestite, not a woman, suggesting that Flaubert dresses as Emma Bovary without changing into her. Within this context, we can see Braithwaite as a transvestite as well. In "Louise Colet's Version" he wears the clothes/identity of Louise Colet without quite becoming her or being gendered female.

The invocation of Flaubert or Braithwaite as transvestites obviously has bearing on any effort to analyze the novel's treatment of gender and sexual orientation. As Judith Butler has argued, transvestism subverts or questions gender binaries for multiple reasons. First, as with hermaphrodites, transvestites, at the very least, suggest the possibility of both genders coexisting in a single person. That is, rather than assigning any individual to one side of the purportedly inherent, "natural" binary of male or female, hermaphrodites implicitly suggest that the existence of such a binary is not natural at all, but culturally imposed, serving the purpose of forcing individuals to one side of the binary or the other. Gender is then not a matter of natural "fact," which language "describes." Rather, the binary structure imposed by language and culture actually creates the gender binary that is culturally accepted as natural. While hermaphroditism, a naturally occurring phenomenon, clearly suggests the failings of gender binaries, transvestism does so as well, albeit less clearly. The reason that transvestism's subversive potential is less obvious is that it can be and has often been discursively naturalized: one of the genders displayed by a transvestite can be read as merely clothing, while the other is the "natural" gender. That is, according to this line of thought, a person with male genitalia who dresses as a woman is not a hybrid or unclassifiable gender but simply a man who is pretending to be a woman.

Butler, however, insightfully resists assimilating a transvestite identity into the standard gender binaries by pointing to the difficulty in extricating the "real" biological gender (or "sex") from the "illusory" performance of the other. She cites Esther Newton, who writes that drag

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is a double inversion that says "appearance is an illusion." Drag says "my 'outside' appearance is feminine, but my essence 'inside' [the body] is masculine." At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; "my appearance 'outside' [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence 'inside' [my self] is feminine."

(qtd. in Butler 137)

That is, a simplistic reading of drag will categorize the real identity on the basis of biology, while a closer inspection reveals that often transvestites adopt the garb of the "opposite" gender precisely because of a feeling that their internal self is more closely aligned with the gender of dress than with the gender of biology. This does not establish the gender of dress as the real one, however. Rather, it renders a stable gender categorization impossible, putting the whole model of surface vs. depth into question. Which "inside" is the one that counts? Which "appearance," body or dress, is the illusion? Such questions cannot be decided. Indeed, from Butler's perspective the performance is what creates the gendered identity, not what conceals it.

Consideration of transvestism thus suggests that genitalia or chromosomes cannot be the beginning and end of the assignment of gender identity. When drag queens perform femininity, they self-consciously construct an essential feminine identity while also revealing that gender is not natural or biological at all, but can be simulated, imitated, or performed. Butler argues that this serves not to parody some original and essential gendered identity but to parody the "very notion of an original" (138). As she puts it, "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*" (137; Butler's italics). Transvestism makes clear that gender is not a simple matter of what "biology" one is born with but rather, according to Butler, "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted . . . through *a stylized repetition of acts*" (140; Butler's italics). Gender, to Butler, is a matter of parroting.

Flaubert's Parrot establishes all of its characters as transvestites or cross-dressers of sorts by creating an equivalent relationship between characters of different genders and by refusing relationships of priority between them. If Ellen = Emma = Flaubert creates either a hermaphroditic character or a transvestite one, this becomes a problem only if one cannot establish which of these names is the primary identity and which is the one only of dress.¹⁹ As I've argued, however, it becomes impossible to de-

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fine the Ellen identity as the real one, or the site of hermeneutic inquiry. Likewise, the Flaubert name, while referring to a real person, can easily be read as mere clothing concealing the real preoccupation with Ellen. In this way Barnes's imitation of a biography both provides an account of Flaubert's life and undercuts his authority as a biographer (see Epstein 230–31). The impossibility of establishing relationships of surface and depth (again, typical of postmodernism) precisely mirrors Butler's discussion of transvestism. We cannot tell which of these figures is the real one and which is the external illusion. When Braithwaite tries on the clothes of Louise Colet, s/he is gendered female, given Butler's claim that gender is imitation. Braithwaite's performance of a nineteenth-century French woman poet is, on these terms, no less convincing than his performance as a contemporary male English doctor.

If Ellen/Emma/Flaubert and Geoffrey/Charles/Louise Colet are, then, essentially transvestite characters whose gender shifts depending on the moment of performance, we cannot construct or specify their relationships as heterosexual or homosexual. Braithwaite's love/desire for his wife certainly seems conventional, except to the degree that the chain of signifiers never allows him to remain purely Braithwaite. If he loves Ellen, then so does Louise Colet, establishing an instance of female same-sex desire. Likewise, this same-sex desire only stands until we recall that Ellen is always also Flaubert, re-establishing a heterosexual relationship except insofar as Flaubert is always Emma Bovary, etc. Just as the novel seems to stabilize into a heterosexual relationship, it drifts into a homoerotic one, and vice versa. In this way it refuses to sanction or even to present the typical hetero/homo binary, continually suggesting how these two models of desire are versions of each other.

Indeed, as Braithwaite's obsession with Flaubert becomes sexualized, the novel's inherent "perversity" opens up in a variety of directions. While Flaubert's purported sexual dalliances might seem to fit comfortably within hetero/homo binaries, his transformation in the novel into a transvestite makes such a simplistic attribution problematic. In addition, Bouilhet's uncanny resemblance to Flaubert, mentioned numerous times in the novel, succeeds in adding yet another link to the signifying chain: Ellen = Emma = Flaubert = Bouilhet and suggests that the proposed Flaubert/Bouilhet sexual encounters are not only homoerotic but also onanistic or narcissistic, neither of which fits comfortably in hetero/homo binaries. Since both masturbation and narcissistic sexual desire may

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combine heterosexual desire/fantasy with a same-sex partner (the self), they straddle the border of any simplistic gender binary.²⁰ Similarly, the book's close attention to Flaubert's metaphorical self-identification with various animals suggests how the desire for Flaubert may be construed as bestiality, especially in view of its discussion of "perverse" animal behavior, including a monkey who attempts to "wank . . . off" a donkey (53).

Likewise, Braithwaite's sexual desire for both Flaubert and Ellen may be classified as yet another "perversion," that of necrophilia, since both of the love objects are dead. To push things this far may seem like a kind of hermeneutic perversion on the critic's part, until one recalls how Barnes goes out of his way to include necrophilia in the novel. Braithwaite describes a "lunatic" named Mirabeau who "would copulate on the dissecting table with a female corpse" in exchange for a cup of coffee (94). Of course, Braithwaite's characterization of Mirabeau as a lunatic seems typical of a society given to classifying and specifying medico-scientific "perversions" and, if anything, we might read his account as a means of separating his own normality from Mirabeau's perversion. At the same time, however, the entire novel is centered around being "randy for relics"—sexually desirous of the history of the dead—and given the chain of significations already established, it is easy to see Mirabeau as yet another version of Braithwaite who is sexually desirous of Flaubert. Indeed, when Mirabeau is asked to copulate with a woman who had been guillotined, he refuses, suggesting that his need for "a face, however dead" (94) is parallel to Braithwaite's own need to put a face on Flaubert or an identity on his wife. Again, desire for knowledge is explicitly linked to sexual desire, and "normal" desire is equivalent to the most "perverse" of supposed perversions.

At this stage, *Flaubert's Parrot* certainly reads more like a catalog of "perversions" than the simple division of masculine friendship and sexual infidelity that Pateman suggests. The possible pedophilia of Flaubert's encounters with the bathhouse boys, the homoeroticism or onanism/narcissism of his relationship with Bouilhet, prostitution, transvestism, bestiality, necrophilia: by comparison, Ellen/Emma/Flaubert's adultery seems, as Nabokov noted, "a most conventional way to rise above the unconventional" (qtd. in *Flaubert's Parrot* 95). In fact, the catalog does not end here. Additional "perversions" abound, from the obscure reference to the "frotteur . . . a sort of sexual deviant who loves the rub of the crowd" (69),²¹ to that most important of sexual transgressions, incest. Braithwaite

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relates how Flaubert, in 1850, considers writing the story of Mycerinus, “the king who fucks his daughter” and of a “woman who wants to be fucked by a god” (129). Both of these are part of Flaubert’s apocrypha, works he considered writing but never completed, and as such are Flaubertian “desires.” Flaubert wrote, “It seems to me, alas, that if you can so thoroughly dissect your children who are still to be born, you don’t get horny enough actually to father them” (129). Here the unwritten stories are the offspring of sexual/narrative desire, and it is unclear who the object of that desire is. Given the long string of “perverse” desires already detailed, however, incest seems the easiest to find, given Flaubert’s long cohabitation with his mother and the Freudian link of all transgressive desires to that for the mother.

The point here is not, however, to make evident the ways in which *Flaubert’s Parrot* creates an extensive list of separate and separable “perversions.” Rather, homo, hetero, and alternative desires are continually layered into each other. Because the novel presents each character as a version of many others, these “perversions” are never separated and categorized in any “scientific” fashion. Instead, each desire is equivalent to every other, or at least the same sexual object can be the recipient of “normal” hetero desire or any number of “perverse” desires, even from the same sexual desirer. Culturally sanctioned desires are mingled with a variety of “perversions” so that the “knowledge” of sexuality never achieves its goal of “scientific” structuration and division.

This isn’t to suggest that Barnes necessarily envisions achieving some kind of sexual/gender utopia where the discipline and oppression socially inherent to gender and sexuality categorizations are dissolved. Indeed, the later *Talking It Over* is clearly less polymorphous in its treatment of sexuality, suggesting the frequent pain and repression of non-normative sexual orientation. Likewise, *Flaubert’s Parrot* is, after all, just a novel, and readers are free to attempt to read it in terms of stable sexual division, even if, as I’ve argued, the text resists such attempts. In fact, most critics, where they have discussed sexuality in the novel at all, have done just that. Georgia Johnston has suggested that Ellen is silenced in the novel in a typical display of masculine assertion of identity, subjectivity, and autonomy. Similarly, Erica Hateley’s brief treatment of the novel, despite an insightful discussion of the Louise Colet section, insists that both Ellen and Colet are silenced because of the dominance of Braithwaite’s voice (181n2). These readings suggest the degree to which standard male/female

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divisions still largely constitute our schemas of reading. Neither critic acknowledges how Ellen is a double for Flaubert, or how Braithwaite's cross-dressing as Colet complicates a reading of the book as misogynistic. At the same time, critics who discuss the novel's commitment to subverting systems of knowledge largely avoid any discussion of gender. James Scott's "Parrot as Paradigms" is the most obvious example. His discussion of the "limits of knowledge and the bondage of humankind to discourse" (67) never acknowledges that knowledge *is* sexuality, nor does it explore the ways in which discourse constructs sexuality and/or gender (as the novel itself does).

Flaubert's Parrot, postmodernism, and the AIDS crisis

It is possible to consider Barnes's work, and postmodernism generally, as apolitical considerations of the metaphysical decay of "truth," but *Flaubert's Parrot*, written and published as the AIDS crisis was developing in the early 1980s, indirectly makes a significant political comment about a time when gay men, particularly in the United States but also in England, were being categorized and stigmatized for their association with the disease. It is useful to remember that the name *AIDS* was not adopted until 1982, after prior candidates (the *gay cancer*, the *gay plague*, and *GRID* [gay-related immune deficiency]) linked the disease to one identifiable category of people (Weeks 117). The shift toward publicly treating AIDS as a universal problem and grudgingly increasing funding accordingly did not occur until 1985 (121). Barnes's novel undermines the whole notion of categorizable gay men who were susceptible to a disease during the height of the institutional effort to define AIDS precisely in those terms.

Responses to the public and institutional attempt to label AIDS as "evidence of secret and inner depravity, pathologized bodily acts, and corresponding identities" (Cole 283) took multiple forms, and the crisis had a significant role in strengthening both a strain of gay/lesbian rights discourse that insisted on a primary and identifiable gay identity and in generating queer theory, an alternative discourse (and not so named until 1991) (see Turner 30). While gay activism had most often relied on sexual orientation as a means to define a stable group-affiliated subjectivity, queer theory resisted any such definition, focusing on differences and deferrals

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of sexual identity (and identity in general), rather than on similarities. Where institutional responses to the AIDS crisis insisted on defining and thus containing AIDS as a punishment for specific lifestyles and behaviors, queer theory rejected any single definition of homosexuality and, indeed, rejected the notion of categorizing people by any specific sexual activity. As William Turner puts it,

One vastly oversimplified but still useful way to understand queer theory begins with the proposition that many persons do not fit the available categories and that such failure of fit reflects a problem not with the persons but with the categories. (32)

The blurring and erasure of such categories both in queer theory and in Barnes may be seen as a response to the cultural effort to reinforce them during the early years of the AIDS crisis. It is also important to recall that the exposure of the historical nature of categories is at the center of the emergence of poststructuralism, particularly in Foucault's *Order of Things*. Indeed, Turner argues that "Poststructuralism is queer" on this account (22). Insofar as postmodernism shares these concerns, we may call it queer as well.²²

In this light, it is clear that Barnes's treatment of the status of knowledge is not separate from or ancillary to his treatment of male friendship and sexual infidelity. His unorthodox treatment of gender is, in fact, not limited to the novels considered here. His Duffy detective novels, written under the nom de plume of Dan Kavanagh, give the reader a bisexual detective seeking, as all detectives do, to uncover hidden knowledge. To suggest that the bisexuality is irrelevant to the detection in these cases seems unlikely, in view of Braithwaite's role as detective into the lives of Ellen and Flaubert.²³ Similarly, Barnes's understated treatment of two English women and their sexual affair in France in "Hermitage" mirrors the concerns of *Talking It Over*, given its portrayal of same-sex desire that is both obvious and subtly obscured over the course of the story. The disturbing sexual obsession in *Before She Met Me* and the sexual "deviance" uncovered and (almost) brought to light in *England, England* also indicate Barnes's consistent interest in the sexually "perverse," and the exploration of race and detection in *Arthur and George* suggests how Barnes continues to interrogate identity categories and their relationship to knowledge. To suggest that Barnes is unconcerned with these categories and that his

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postmodernism is insular and apolitical is thus to ignore the evidence of his work. With Barnes as exemplar, then, it may be time to revive the dinosaur that is postmodernism and reexamine its political usefulness, even in texts that initially seem disconnected from our current critical preoccupations.

Notes

1. There is, of course, a body of Barnes criticism. A search for his name in the MLA database yields 105 references. By comparison, a search for Salman Rushdie yields 852 references. Both authors began publishing at roughly the same time, have been linked to postmodernism, and continue to write. Certainly the political subject matter and the Rushdie affair have impacted the amount of critical attention to his work, but this is precisely my point. The perception that Barnes is less political contributes to the smaller amount of critical attention he has received.
2. There are, of course, some exceptions. This description fits some parts of *History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (1989) but not others. It does not fit any of *The Porcupine* (1992), which revolves around an Eastern European state trial, or *Arthur and George*.
3. See for instance Moseley (1) and Guignery (1).
4. Hélène Cixous deploys the former slogan in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (2045), where it is seemingly derived from the latter, a phrase usually attributed to American feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson.
5. Sedgwick observes that homophobia is not a necessary by-product of patriarchy. While treating women as objects of exchange is a central feature of patriarchal societies, some of these societies, notably ancient Greece, have treated homoeroticism as a celebration of the self-evident superiority of men, while others have articulated the social and economic relationships central to maintaining masculine hegemony as antithetical to homosexuality (*Between Men* 3–4). One reason for this may be the discursive shift that Foucault identifies: around 1870, he claims, the societal focus moved away from the condemnation of sodomy as sinful, and toward the specification of the homosexual as a type of person to be pathologized (43). Sedgwick avails herself of Foucault but displays some skepticism about this "simple" explanation (*Epistemology* 44). The term "compulsory heterosexuality" comes from Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" and is picked up in the context of women as objects of exchange by Gayle Rubin.

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6. The novel complicates this reading by offering several other metaphors for love. Likewise, it is impossible to reduce Gillian to merely an articulation of the traffic in women between Oliver and Stuart despite the insistent metaphor. Because Gillian's voice is heard as often as theirs, she maintains an autonomy that exceeds that of the female characters in many of the texts that Sedgwick examines.

7. In fact, Sedgwick is quick to point out that the "utopian" dimension of poststructuralism is not decisive. The contradictions of homosexual/heterosexual definition, she suggests, may contribute both to oppression and to liberation (*Epistemology* 10–11).

8. Examples of veiled homoeroticism in the novel become plentiful in light of Val's assertion. Most obvious is a scene where Oliver requests a "Dutch Fuck" from Stuart (a light transferred directly from one phallic cigarette to another), but receives a "Glasgow kiss" instead (a butt from and to the head) (164). Stuart's references to Oliver's "horrible leering" in this episode, combined with a pain located near his "arsehole" (165) following the encounter confirm Sedgwick's claim that same-sex desire is often presented in literary representations in the form of a "subordinated yoking with an apparently already-constituted homophobia" that is often configured as pain near the "bowels and backside" (*Between Men* 113).

9. Like the epigraph about "lying like an eyewitness," Gillian's job as a restorer of paintings is used to question the possibility of objective knowledge. When Oliver asks her when she knows she has reached the "true" original painting, Gillian responds, "it's an artistic rather than a scientific decision, when to stop. . . . There's no 'real' picture under there waiting to be revealed" (122).

10. These notions are common to psychoanalysis, of course, but perhaps the clearest reference is Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."

11. See Higdon for another psychoanalytic reading (181).

12. Braithwaite is only fictional, of course, despite the usual postmodern trickery that the book employs to destabilize the reality/fiction binary. Most obvious in this regard is the brief note on the copyright page where Barnes notes that "all translations in the book are by Geoffrey Braithwaite," as if to suggest that Braithwaite is a real person who has contributed to Barnes's book. He is not.

13. Whether or not Flaubert ever actually said this is a matter of debate. Supposedly, Amélie Bosquet, a friend of his, is the source of the attribution, but Herbert Lottman denies that the author could ever have made such a remark.

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Barnes, however, refutes Lottman (*Something to Declare* 140–41). Both Barnes and Braithwaite act as if the attribution to Flaubert is accurate enough to have some validity in commentary on the novel and author.

14. As Laurent Milesi points out, all of this attention to the parrot as imitator makes it clear that the bird is also a symbol for writing (193), further eroding the books/life distinction that Braithwaite posits.

15. Braithwaite's critique of Auden, Spender, and Isherwood, followed by a similar condemnation of Virginia Woolf, can be easily read as homophobic. This is no reason to assume, however, that Barnes, or the novel, agrees with Braithwaite. In fact, in a French interview, Barnes says "j'aime beaucoup Auden, Spender et Isherwood" (qtd. in Pateman 25). Here it seems possible to link Braithwaite's homophobia to his homoerotic attraction for Flaubert in light of Sedgwick's notion that the two are inevitably "yoked together."

16. For another attempt by Barnes to reconstruct some of the details of the Colet/Flaubert affair, see "Not Drowning but Waving: The Case of Louise Colet" (*Something to Declare* 159–78).

17. The chapter is based on Flaubert's posthumous *Le Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues*.

18. Barnes returns to Flaubert's tendency to see himself as both man and woman in his essay "Consolation v. Desolation." He suggests that Flaubert and George Sand "shared an element of gender attenuation, or perhaps gender elision" (*Something to Declare* 207–08) and discusses the few instances where Flaubert is documented to have cross-dressed.

19. The gendering of these characters becomes even more ambiguous when we recall that Emma Bovary dresses like a man with some frequency (Flaubert 16, 178), wears her hair like a man (116), and wishes to have a male child to offset the powerlessness of her femininity (82). Colet (via Braithwaite) also cites Flaubert's view of her in *Flaubert's Parrot*: "He used to tell me I was less of a woman . . . that I was a woman in flesh but a man in spirit: that I was an *hermaphrodite nouveau*, a third sex" (166). Colet/Braithwaite denies this charge, but in this chapter, at the very least, it is true.

20. For a useful discussion of how "doubling" or self-identification serves as a signifier of same-sex desire and as a forcible repression of that desire, see Sedgwick (*Epistemology* 162).

21. The reference to the frotteur is linked by Braithwaite to Nabokov's *Lolita*, another postmodern novel that explores "perversion," especially pedophilia, but also homosexuality.

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22. Poststructuralism and postmodernism are not, of course, the same; the former is much more circumscribed and easier to define than the latter. I would argue, however, that poststructuralist philosophy is one of the two primary coordinates for defining the postmodern. The second, along the lines of Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Jameson, is a (post) Marxist evaluation of a culture that no longer has a sense of the real—whether through simulacra, language games, or models of endless exchange.

23. See Moseley (5–6, 33–53) and Guignery (28–36) for discussions of the Duffy novels.

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Conrad's Grotesque Public: Pornography and the Politics of Reading in *The Secret Agent*

Matthew Oliver

Why is *The Secret Agent* set in a pornography shop? This question has been engaging an increasing number of critics of Joseph Conrad's espionage novel, though usually at the periphery of their main arguments. John Lutz recently made what is becoming a typical connection between pornography and the politics of the novel: "like the consumption of pornography, the revolutionary activities of the novel's anarchists constitute a flight from history and meaningful political engagement" (22). While this notion that pornography parallels the political ineffectiveness or moral repugnance of revolutionary politics has become the most common reading of its presence in this novel, I would like to argue that to understand the function of pornography in *The Secret Agent*, we must turn to one of Conrad's key concerns: how art has its effect on an audience. When we do this, pornography emerges as a more politically subversive element: it partakes in the novel's larger practice of using the grotesque to undermine any formation of stable, homogeneous reading publics.

Conrad's letters often exhibit anxiety about his ability to reach an audience with his desired effects, but at times he was also ambivalent about the potential of narrative to erase distinctions in mass reading publics. In a 1910 letter to fellow novelist and friend John Galsworthy, he demonstrates his anxieties about viewing individuals as a "public" and his concern that seeing them as homogeneous turns them into grotesque monsters:

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The public is not to be found in a class, caste, clique or type. The public is (or are?) individuals. Le *public introuvable* [sic] is only *introuvable* simply because it is all humanity. And no artist can give it what it wants because humanity doesn't know what it wants. But it will swallow anything. It will swallow Hall Caine and John Galsworthy [. . .] It is an ostrich, a clown, a giant, a bottomless sack. It is sublime. It has apparently no eyes and no entrails, like a slug, and yet it can weep and suffer. (385)

On the surface, we may find here yet another modernist diatribe on the degenerate reading public. The public's blind consumption of anything makes it into a monster that will "swallow anything" from Hall Caine, a writer Conrad detested, to his friend Galsworthy. If we look a little closer, though, we will notice that Conrad also vacillates between a homogenizing discourse of universality, where the public is "all humanity," and an insistence that it is made up of individuals. This ambivalence is pictured most clearly in his confusion about what verb he should use: "The public is (or are?)." While he speaks in terms of universals, his discomfort with reducing a group of individuals to a mass identity manifests in his use of grotesque imagery to show the deforming effects of homogeneity. Representing a group of individuals as a "public" results, in Conrad's imagination, not in a unified, unbroken body but a mass of mismatched, undifferentiated features. In his role as an author, Conrad frequently worries about how to reach the "public," yet at the same time, passages such as this indicate his ambivalence about the damaging effects of mass identity.

I am arguing that Conrad's anxiety about the homogenizing possibilities of narrative—its ability to form unified communities—is central to his artistic practice, and that in *The Secret Agent* in particular the grotesque functions as a strategy for fragmenting rather than unifying his reading public. To this end the novel deploys the fraught discourse of pornography, both in its representational content and its formal structures. In making such an argument, I am following a recent tendency in Conrad criticism to focus on how the stylistic innovations of Conrad's novels critique and subvert political discourses that are still active in the twenty-first century. For *The Secret Agent* much of such criticism has focused on its critique of media representations that construct Western-centered frameworks for dealing with terrorism and revolutionary politics—in Conrad's case a cri-

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tique of the power structures and narratives underlying British empire, in contemporary politics a critique of the "Americanization" of international responses to terrorism. The recently published volume of essays *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century* (Kaplan) illustrates this trend particularly well, and I would position my argument especially alongside Robert Hampson's on Conrad's "heterotopic fiction."¹ Hampson argues that in Conrad "different places have been superimposed in what is, effectively, a process of composite map-making" (122). Instead of forming a "homogeneous, fictional space," his heterogeneous spaces engage "with imperialist practices" and undermine their effects. These imperialist practices parallel the present-day "identification of the U.S. with civilization, democracy, and modernity," which "makes it difficult to imagine modernity or civilization outside that particular narrow grid." I am arguing that Conrad uses the grotesque for similar purposes: instead of unifying audience response in order to create homogeneous national publics (as imperial practice would do), he offers a fracturing narrative that precludes a unifying effect. In short, *The Secret Agent* critiques homogeneous political narratives by refusing to provide one of its own.

That narrative technique is implicated in political homogeneity is central to Benedict Anderson's argument that the novel as a genre creates homogeneous national communities. According to Anderson, the novel represents similar individuals moving through a unified space in homogeneous time, producing in its readers a sense of community with other readers through the shared affective experience of the novel. Presumably the individual reader's experience is identical (or at least comparable) to that of thousands of others. We are part of a nation because we share the same unified space and feel the same things.² *The Secret Agent*, however, shows us how a novel can resist creating a community by a representational practice like the grotesque that favors multiplicity and uncertainty. It does this by showing how narratives of group identity do violence to individual identity, a violence often represented through literally deforming, grotesque effects on the bodies of characters. At the same time, the novel's grotesque narrative fragments response rather than unifying it. Thus, by titling this essay "Conrad's Grotesque Public," I do not mean to imply that Conrad is attacking the reading public by representing it as grotesque; instead, I am arguing that there is no identifiable reading public to be found in the novel, except through the effects of the grotesque. The discourse of pornography is central to my argument because it use-

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fully reveals these effects: its social contradictions provide a particularly important instance of the grotesque contradictions inherent in attempts to form reading publics. To demonstrate this connection between the grotesque and pornography, I will focus on two key figures: the anarchist Michaelis, whose monstrous body shows how homogenizing narratives make individuals grotesque; and the pornography shop, which invokes a discourse of reading and bodily affect that fragments audience response.

Grotesque distortion

The grotesquerie of *The Secret Agent* has become such a commonplace that the adjective *grotesque* is often appended to descriptions of the novel without any argumentative function or theoretical specificity. Throughout this argument, I will use the term to refer to imagery or language that is based on a seemingly inappropriate or repulsive mixing of discourses.³ This mixture typically involves the intervention of alien elements into the ideal human body, producing such combinations as human and animal, living and mechanical, old and young. Obesity, for instance, is usually grotesque in Conrad because it combines the human body with elements of the animal, often the pig. Importantly, the grotesque involves a *perceptual* experience. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, for instance, points out that one definitive element of the grotesque is a “gap or interval” during which the perceiving subject is unsure into which category the perceived object fits (*On the Grotesque* 18). However, although the grotesque is perceptual, it need not be visual. Readers of a narrative perceive actions and character types with the same level of visibility as material bodies. Thus, the grotesque can encompass the monstrous character, the grotesque action, and the grotesque scene in addition to the grotesque body. In a novel like *The Secret Agent*, frequently concerned with the effects of narratives on audiences, the grotesque becomes a powerful representational tool.

Although Conrad never explicitly defines or theorizes it,⁴ the numerous examples of distorted bodies in *The Secret Agent* help us to define a Conradian grotesque. Throughout the novel he shows how blindly swallowing or accepting the identity narratives enforced by a dominant power creates dangerous inconsistencies and fault lines in identity. These discursive contradictions manifest literally in his text in the form of grotesque bodies through representations of physical deformity and mindless or excessive consumption, and such representations reveal and critique

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the ways the body is distorted by discourse and perception. For instance, multiple characters describe Verloc as an animal. He first appears with “an air of having wallowed” all day in bed (10) and moves in “a fat pig style” (16), and Vladimir’s first line describing him is “He’s fat—the animal” (20). These references to obesity as an animalistic intrusion on the human form echo throughout the narrative in a number of examples of how excess consumption literally affects the body, as when Winnie’s mother’s legs swell to “an enormous size” as she experiences “complete relief from material cares” (12). The many distorted bodies in this novel emphasize the means by which identity discourses are written on the body beyond that body’s control, leading to a profound ambivalence about the practice of representing individual or group identities.

This use of the grotesque to represent the distorting effects of identity narratives—particularly state discourses of national identity—on the body manifests most clearly in the anarchist character Michaelis. The key scene (one of the few places where Conrad uses the word *grotesque* in a precise, definable context) is the story of Michaelis’s professional career and the reactions to him at his rich patroness’s home. *Grotesque* shows up several times here, most prominently as Michaelis gets up to leave the room after an informal political lecture to his patroness and her friends. A number of guests comment on his “monstrous” physical condition, ending with a man who “pronounced mincingly the word ‘Grotesque,’ whose justness was appreciated by those standing near him” (87). What is it that makes “grotesque” the “just” word for Michaelis? The obvious answer might be his tremendous physical bulk, an image of overconsumption. Only two pages earlier he is “pathetic in his grotesque and incurable obesity” (85). However, his bulk is not solely attributable to overeating. Elsewhere the narrator informs us that Michaelis’s weight problem resulted from his time in prison, during which he could not exercise. Indeed, just before the application of the epithet “grotesque,” the government’s role in his physical debilitation has been the subject of discussion: “And they kept him shut up for twenty years. One shudders at the stupidity of it” (87). So “grotesque” refers not only to Michaelis’s obesity but also to the social causes of it. In other words, his body is grotesque as an index of the wrongs perpetrated on him by the state, his inability to control the way it shaped both his body and his identity.

That Michaelis’s body has been violently deformed due to his refusal of the state’s ideal becomes even clearer as we consider his political history.

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This narrative, completed just before his much-observed exit, tells of his trial and imprisonment for his involvement in an attempt to save several political prisoners. During this trial, his identity and his words—his own stories of his own identity—are subsumed by the public discourse about him. Indeed, the crime for which he was tried was the result of an accident: one of the guards was inadvertently shot (and not by Michaelis). This accident is described by the narrator as a failed “plot” (84), and the story becomes sensationalized because of the chance circumstances of the killed guard: he “left a wife and three small children, and the death of that man aroused through the length and breadth of a realm for whose defence, welfare, and glory men die every day as a matter of duty, an outburst of furious indignation” (84). The story creates a sensation because it gets read as a foreign assault on the family and the foundations of the nation. Although Michaelis’s intentions were clearly to liberate people from state power, he gets caught up in the sort of public sensation that exceeds his actions or his role in the event, and the extent to which his identity is thereby constructed by audience expectations about national enemies is indicated in the descriptions of the trial, where his “compunction appeared shockingly imperfect to the crammed court” and the judge “commented feelingly upon the depravity and callousness of the young prisoner” (85). Public reaction constructs his identity as depraved and callous in the same way that his imprisonment reshaped his body. Both body and identity become victims of the violence of state power and mass identity, and Michaelis becomes a grotesque because the reactions of the national audience make him one.

At the same time, his association with anarchists and revolutionaries, far from freeing Michaelis, entangles him in other ascribed identities. He achieves a “groundless fame” from “people who wished to exploit the sentimental aspect of his imprisonment” (85). His life has been turned into a social narrative, a grotesque narrative in fact, for just as his body registers the effects of society, it in turn shapes the discourse around him. Rather than focusing on his ideas and arguments (which Conrad parodies mercilessly elsewhere in the novel), the crowd at his patroness’s home can focus only on his body, and after he leaves, they transform it into the story they want to tell about the government’s grotesque actions. The patroness comments, “And that officially is supposed to be a revolutionist! What nonsense” (86). Unable to take Michaelis seriously in the same way that a representative of law such as Inspector Heat does, the patroness

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renarrates his identity in her own terms as a “poor creature” who is “no longer in a position to take care of himself” (87). Michaelis is a curious and complicated grotesque: he is represented as grotesque in that his body (and identity) is passively subject to popular narratives (he has passively consumed so much as to become literally obese), yet the discourse that calls him grotesque is itself monstrous in reducing him to a passive subject. The result would seem to be a fundamental anxiety about the ability of narratives to represent individuals without violent distortion. Even the description of Michaelis as “grotesque” is parodied, as the word is pronounced “mincingly,” and although the patroness supports and sympathizes with Michaelis, her communication with him is described as “the efforts at moral intercourse between the inhabitants of remote planets,” a “grotesque incarnation of humanitarian passion” that nonetheless “appealed somehow to one’s imagination” (86) just as it is “the monstrosity of the man” that ultimately “had fascinated” the patroness (87).

This refusal to enforce a single means of representation, even a grotesque one, has its stylistic parallel in the language of the novel, which is grotesque in a way that I would call oxymoronic. Above, we saw how discursive contradiction appears in the form of distorted bodies, where the ideal of the unified body is contradicted by obesity and monstrosity caused by the state, presumptively acting as the guarantor of social unity. Similarly, as another form of contradiction, the oxymoron is the figure of speech that most characterizes Conrad’s style in *The Secret Agent*; both in the solitary oxymorons that appear throughout the text and the larger oxymoronic structures visible in some passages, it is part of an overall refusal of cohesive meaning and homogeneous affect.⁵ One could note any number of examples: Mr Verloc has a “fanatical inertness” (16) and is “steady like a rock—a soft kind of rock” (17); Yundt speaks with “worn out passion” and “impotent fierceness” (38); the Professor requires “inglorious heroism” (54) and responds with “ostentatious indifference” (62). And there are numerous examples of large-scale oxymorons: Stevie’s mother “abandons” him in order to “settl[e] her son permanently in life” (163); Verloc’s house is “ensconced cosily behind the shop of doubtful wares” (148) but is frequently described as “respectable.” Ultimately, the Conradian grotesque arises from such contradictions, representing the world in mixed ways that defy the conventional categorizations that national identity positions require. Both his language and what it represents undermine the ideals upon which group identity is built, revealing them

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as violent distortions of the individual and refusing, as much as possible, to enforce such distortions in his own narrative.

Pornography and the grotesque home

This brings us back to the function of pornography as a central motif in *The Secret Agent*, for in it the key elements of the grotesque converge: the difficult relation of narrative to group identities, the violent distortion perpetrated by state power to enforce national identities, and the contradictory structure that refuses to enforce homogeneous meaning. In some ways, of course, pornography is nearly invisible in the narrative. Although Verloc, the titular secret agent, is the owner of a pornography shop, and much of the novel's action takes place there, no form of the word *pornography* ever appears, and the issues raised by this setting remain as hidden as the merchandise itself, discreetly wrapped in paper bags. And despite its increasing currency in discussions of the novel, pornography has rarely been treated at length.⁶ But while Conrad might have frowned on the literal manifestations of pornography and revolutionary politics, as discursive practices they enabled him to create a form that broke with the homogenizing tendencies of the traditional novel. They made available a discourse of social contradictions that could help reveal the grotesquerie of hegemonic narratives. One of the central structural oxymorons in *The Secret Agent* is the pornography shop as home, which, inverting the moral center of the Victorian novel, reveals the sexual drives beneath the moral justifications for the protective exercise of state power embodied in the novel by the police. Stylistically, this central contradiction is manifest in scenes of cryptopornography, ambiguous scenes that hint at the narrative discourse of pornography but prompt multiple potential responses alongside it. Thus, pornography is central to the novel's grotesque aesthetic. Not only does it enable bizarre contradictions (home as pornography shop) but it also destabilizes interpretation. The mixed discourse registers of these cryptopornographic scenes thus undermine the text's ability to form unified group identity based on shared reading experience. The prospect of a national body is forestalled by the representation and response of individual bodies, and only violent enforcement of identity narratives can create a unified group.

The discourse of pornography, then, undermines simplistic categorical distinctions, like that between moral Englishness and immoral foreign

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influences, subverting the reader's recognition of a homogeneous national identity. Verloc's occupation as a seller of pornography, for example, parallels his uncertain national identity. He has a foreign name yet claims to be English. When pushed for details, he gives an even more muddled picture, claiming he is a "natural born British subject [...] But my father was French" (23).⁷ Pornography has also often been treated as a foreign influence (usually French in origin), yet its material history suggests an uncertain boundary between England and the foreign. This helps to answer a question so basic that it has rarely been asked: why is Verloc a seller of pornography? I suggest it is because pornography establishes a convergence between his liminal national identity, pornography's liminal existence as international commodity, and the novel's breakdown of the privileged domestic sphere that defined Victorian British identity and underwrote the existence of its empire.⁸ Thus, in order to understand how national identity is at stake in pornography, we must turn our attention to why the pornography shop is also Verloc's home.

Pornography in the novel undercuts one of the key narratives of national cohesion in England, the family as the foundation of domestic life (*domestic* as "in the home" and "within national boundaries"). As I have already mentioned, the pornography shop as home is one of the strongest grotesque elements of the novel. Exposing bodily instincts and making private and primitive interiors public and visible, pornographic discourse forms a grotesque mixture with the discourse of the family as the moral center of the nation whose innocence must be protected by violent exercises of state power (as we saw in the case of Michaelis). The use of family as a metonym for nation follows a long narrative tradition, particularly in the Victorian novel, where the home life of families is often a microcosm for the national life,⁹ and in *The Secret Agent* the centrality of family in narratives of national coherence is most at stake in the passage where the Assistant Commissioner of the police approaches Westminster. The narrator emphasizes that the Assistant Commissioner is going into "the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets" before "[p]enetrating through a portal [...] into the precincts of the House which is the House, *par excellence* in the minds of many millions of men" (162). The passage indicates several corresponding social planes, first the implied family house at the smallest level, then the "House" as seat of national government, and finally the empire as a whole. The British Empire is founded on English homes, which constitute its reason for existing and

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are in turn patterned on the state as the house “*par excellence*.”¹⁰ Already, at the glorified national scale, the entrance can only be gained by moving into a comparatively private space, as the Assistant Commissioner “penetrates” through the portal, suggesting the sexual implications so grotesquely evident in Verloc’s home. His house too can only be accessed by penetrating the sexual space of the porn shop,¹¹ which, like Verloc, is a liminal figure, poised between inside and outside, mixing qualities of the foreign with the domestic. Through these parallel homes, though, the novel makes the grotesque suggestion that the nation *is* a pornography shop—that is, the supposedly foreign influences in the novel always arise from within the national body, and the homogeneous surface of national identity is fragmented by the difference within.

Consequently, to treat pornography as an outside influence is to participate in the hegemonic narrative of home and foreign that *The Secret Agent* undermines. As a grotesque element, pornography suggests how difference arises from within the nation itself. Nonetheless, the association of pornography with foreignness has been common since the Victorian period, and pornography as a purely foreign influence continues to be the most common reading of the shop’s status in the novel. More than once the narrative emphasizes that the stock in Verloc’s shop comes from the Continent: “He renewed his stock from Paris and Brussels. Often he went over to make his purchases personally” (138). Brian Shaffer’s response to these details is typical: “France—and particularly Paris, the European ‘capital of vice’ in the mind of Britons—is repeatedly alluded to in *The Secret Agent* as the source of pornographic pamphlets and revolutionary ideas alike” (446). To Shaffer and many other critics, the novel is at least satirizing English fears of the Continent’s moral influence, at most sharing in them. Yet this is based on only a partial reading of the historical details, as though critics are themselves swallowing the homogeneous narrative of English national purity. Some recent scholarship, however, suggests a more complicated situation. While *The Secret Agent* is not exactly a history of pornographic distribution, the appearance of pornography in the novel does arise at a time when public debates concerned pornography as a case of England making itself foreign, a very public battle to prevent the importation of this material. It ultimately resulted in the Post Office (Protection) Act of 1884, around the time when the novel’s action occurs. (Sigel, *Governing* 84). Lisa Sigel has shown that the importation of pornography was not simply a matter of English retailers importing foreign goods but

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often of English producers moving abroad to avoid prosecution. "By the end of the nineteenth century," Sigel writes, "the production, distribution, and consumption of British pornography became an international affair. British pornographers moved to the Continent in an attempt to outwit legal authorities" ("Rise" 116). Paris did indeed become the "center of distribution," but it was, at least in part, expatriated British publishers, not simply dangerous foreigners, who were responsible. Pornography, then, is not only an image of dangerous foreignness but also of Englishness making itself foreign, demonstrating the permeability of national boundaries in an increasingly international economy. Verloc's pornography shop is revealed as an even more complicated liminal space when considered in this light.

If pornography is a discourse that shows foreignness arising from fissures in national identity, then it also shows how the individuals who make up the nation cannot be shaped into coherent groups. The effect of discourse on audience cannot be easily predicted, and the identity of the audience is itself often a rhetorical construct. For instance, the narrative of a pure, coherent nation being invaded by foreigners would suggest that the audience for pornography consisted primarily of foreign or socially marginalized classes such as immigrants or laborers. However, such anti-pornography rhetoric did not fit the facts: Sigel notes that pornography was "widely unaffordable before 1914 for the struggling working classes and for the middling classes who labored to differentiate themselves from mere workers" (*Governing* 90).¹² In fact, the primary consumers of pornography were the upper classes, those most identified with Englishness. Thus, the "very young men, who hung about the window [of Verloc's shop] for a time before slipping in suddenly" (9) likely represent the sons of wealth, the central families of England, making themselves foreign by their visit to the pornography shop in much the same way that Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner do when they visit later in the novel.¹³ Pornography in this novel allows Conrad to represent a hidden center of national identity, the foreignness mixed into the very heart of the country, providing an alternative to hegemonic discourses of national identity by revealing the nation as a grotesque mixture of home and foreign.

Not only was this audience difficult to identify, but the effect of the text on it was difficult to predict. Pornography was important to this novel's politics of reading, because a prominent feature of the public de-

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bate about pornography was the problem of definition—the ambiguity about whether a text has the intention to or effect of inciting lust in its reader. Part of pornography's attraction for Conrad may reflect that it was (and is) such a contested field of discourse, mirroring his own anxieties about how an audience and a writer align their intentions and responses as part of the same community of feeling. Walter Kendrick argues that because the word *pornography* originated in the “acceptable” discourses of science, art, and the museum, the boundaries of this discourse were even more blurry at the beginning of the twentieth century than they are today. Authors writing with presumably scientific or scholarly intent were concerned with how to keep their books out of the hands of those they might inflame with lust (28). Attempting to define pornography in order to form a binary categorization of licit and illicit—to erase diversity by defining a unified realm of discourse, a moral “us” against an immoral “them”—throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the state tried to define pornography principally in view of a writer's intention.¹⁴ In Conrad's day these issues were still hotly debated: in 1898 one accused pornographer cited the “scientific spirit” in defense of his book (Kendrick 162), while the aesthetic movement's slogan “art for art's sake” was becoming an increasingly common defense (170–71), and there was widespread disagreement among different sectors of society about what constituted pornography and what was a legitimate text.¹⁵ In this discursive context, then, pornography clearly raises the question of how much an author can know and control the bodies of individual readers. The difficulty in pinning down what sort of text inflames lust and what describes the body in a “scientific spirit” suggests the larger difficulty about whether one can affect a group at all. The attempt to imagine an audience—a group, a nation—is undercut by the diverse individual bodies of that nation, making pornography a challenge to hegemonic discourse.

Cryptopornography

Thus pornography helps *The Secret Agent* fragment its audience by raising the question about how the reader is to react to a particular scene, how to discern an intention in it. The novel does this by mixing modes and genres to produce several scenes that I am calling cryptopornographic. These scenes exploit pornography's unpredictable effects on readers by confronting them with elements of pornographic discourse without a

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clear indication of intention. Mixing narrative types to create a confusion of effect, such scenes preclude the text's construction of a group identity in its readers.¹⁶ By extension, this textual practice undermines the legitimizing narratives of national identity that require a unity of effect.

One small-scale example of cryptopornography occurs late in chapter 3, shortly after Verloc's lengthy meeting with the anarchists. Here the narrative takes us into the Verlocs' bedroom, and then, as if to underscore this voyeuristic entry into the inner sanctum of domesticity, offers a paragraph of seemingly gratuitous description of Verloc undressing. The reader is given an article-by-article description of "the operation of undressing" (48), "operation" seeming to describe the cold, clinical eye of the "scientific spirit." But the passage gives more detail than strictly necessary for that purpose, starting with Verloc "flinging his overcoat on a distant chair"; then, "[h]is coat and waistcoat followed." The text keeps our attention on his clothing as he walks around the room "in his stockinged feet," and it draws attention to "his burly figure." Then he "slipp[ed] his braces off his shoulder" before looking out the window. His presence at the window, along with the detail that he "passed and repassed across the long strip of looking glass," emphasizes the possibility of various gazes on his body, including of course the reader's. The scene plays like a grotesque strip tease, and while the "burly figure" may not inspire the reader's lust, the text continually overemphasizes the asexuality of the "operation" and the "business-like manner" with which he gets into bed. The whole scene calls attention to the reader's voyeuristic gaze, paralleling the pornographic gaze of those who patronize the shop (which is also part of this home); the reader is yet another voyeur, motivated by primitive impulses to look into the secrets of the Verloc home, and if the passage is not sexy, the overinsistence that it is not erotic suggests (humorously) that the audience may wish that it were. This scene thus invokes a mixed response: is it sexual? humorous? scientific? Its refusal to settle in a unitary pattern fragments its effect.

A lengthier cryptopornographic scene is Winnie's encounter with the anarchist Ossipon, after she murders Verloc. In terms of narrative effect, this is one of the most complicated moments in Conrad's fiction. After the graphic murder scene in the previous chapter, the reader is deep in a domestic melodrama/crime story, yet the staging of Winnie's scene with Ossipon mixes equal parts comedy and eroticism. As a result, the scene complicates the question of textual intention and produces a discontinu-

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ous, fractured audience response. In fact, the scene is also *about* discontinuities in communication. Ossipon at first does not recognize Winnie, assuming she is a drunk woman, and intends to seduce her, but even after recognizing her he is unable to dismiss his persistent first impression: "It seemed impossible to him that she should be drinking. But one never knows" (203). Winnie feels validated by Ossipon's presence, yet her first response—"You recognized me" (204)—is yet another misrecognition, for Ossipon did not recognize her until she addressed him by name. The comic charge builds as the erotic one does, with the threat of Winnie's violent act lurking beneath the surface. The passage frequently emphasizes the physical contact between them—"he tried to draw her to his breast" (203), "She slipped her hand under his arm" which "startled" him by its "palpably resolute character" (204)—and suggests the common pornographic scene of a woman seducing a man, as Ossipon becomes increasingly "unable to make up his mind for a bold move" and Winnie touches him first. Ossipon "felt himself being impelled forward," "yielded to the impulse," "submitted," and was "as if unable to command his feeling" (204–05). Together they appear "loverlike" (205), and Winnie invokes a classic fallen-woman script as she cries, "I was a respectable woman [...] Till he made me what I am" (206). Yet even here, the humorous structure of the passage comes through, for "what she is" is not a prostitute or unfaithful wife, as context would suggest to Ossipon, but a murderer. Conrad continually toys with Ossipon's misunderstanding of the situation, as the anarchist assumes Verloc died in the bomb blast and that he is comforting the widow. As she explains what happened without specifically telling him about the murder, the narrator even steps in to clarify that this scene is about miscommunication:

she had imagined her incoherence to be clearness itself. She had no conscience of how little she had audibly said in the disjointed phrases completed only in her thought. She had felt the relief of a full confession, and she gave a special meaning to every sentence spoken by Comrade Ossipon, whose knowledge did not in the least resemble her own. (211)

Winnie and Ossipon assume that they are sharing a story and thus sharing values and goals, when in fact their problem is that they each have a different understanding of the situation. The desire for a unified group understanding (in this case, a group of two) leads to dangerous assumptions about shared interpretation.

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The scene continues to fracture both the characters' responses and the audience's up until Ossipon, assuming Verloc has been blown to atoms, looks through the window from the shop into the home. There he "discovered Mr Verloc reposing quietly on the sofa" (218) (another misreading, as Verloc is not asleep but dead). He fears that Winnie, "that savage woman," has been attempting to entrap him, perhaps working with the police—yet another humorous misreading. When she sees a police officer coming, Winnie runs into the shop, turns off the light, and grabs Ossipon.

He ceased to struggle [. . .] Her hands had locked themselves with an inseparable twist of fingers on his robust back. While the footsteps approached, they breathed quickly, breast to breast, with hard laboured breaths, as if theirs had been the attitude of deathly struggle. (214)

Of course, there is another "attitude" that this description suggests, the same one that Ossipon has been aiming at since meeting Winnie: a sexual encounter. Following on the comic misunderstandings of the previous paragraph, this tableau—the two clasped together in the dark in a pornography shop, the defender of social order looking through the windows, a dead body in the other room—mixes fear and desire, inciting a complicated series of responses. Should we laugh? Be aroused? Be thrilled in suspense? After the officer leaves, "the man and woman inside stood motionless, panting, breast to breast" (215). At this point it might be fair to say that the reader, like Ossipon, has "no settled conception of what was happening to him" or her (214). The text invites the reader to feel the sexual desire at the bottom of this relationship, yet at the same time represses it beneath the shame inspired by the police presence. The officer fails to serve as the guarantor of social order that would end this confusion, allowing the interior scene to flourish in its multivalent meanings. It is as though a pornographic scene has played beneath the surface of the manifest scene in a continually dissonant counterpoint. The text, resisting a single generic form, is thus too monstrous to generate a single community of readers; instead, reader responses are allowed to branch off in differing directions. This use of the grotesque contrasts starkly with Conrad's representation of grotesques who swallow the state's legitimizing discourses. But with his monstrous style Conrad refuses to offer a single narrative that would replace state power. In order to understand this re-

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luctance, we must turn one more time to the novel's powerful images of the violent effects of enforcing a homogeneous group identity.

The immediately preceding event, Winnie's murder of Verloc, occurs in yet another cryptopornographic scene, also based on the characters' failure to communicate.¹⁷ Here the communication gap is resolved by a violent act that enforces a grotesque "accord" between the two characters by silencing difference, the very type of violence that the novel's multivalence refuses. Winnie's murder of Verloc dramatizes the imposition of a homogeneous audience response, suggesting the grotesque idea that only a violent silencing of all communication between husband and wife can produce a happy marriage. Thus Conrad repeats "accord" each time he describes the silencing of difference necessary to maintain their marriage. The first example occurs early in Winnie's conversation with Verloc: "he trusted his wife. Their accord was perfect, but it was not precise. It was a tacit accord [. . .] They refrained from going to the bottom of facts and motives" (185). The idea of not "going to the bottom of facts" is repeated throughout the novel, and here Verloc's intimacy with his wife has "a certain element of vagueness" (185–86) as a result of the silence between them that is a necessary condition of their accord. The claim that "their accord was perfect" seems to come from Verloc's point of view, rather than the narrator, and it becomes increasingly ironic as Verloc fails to understand Stevie's significance to Winnie in their conversation. To Verloc, his role in causing her brother's death is simply the occasion for potential legal troubles, while for Winnie, it is an occasion for grief. A few pages later, still assuming that Winnie is worried about their future rather than grieving for her brother, he attempts to encourage her: "He waved his hand. He seemed to boast. He wished only to put heart into her. It was a benevolent intention, but Mr Verloc had the misfortune not to be in accord with his audience" (188). Here the narrator's point of view clearly diverges from Verloc's, revealing the distance between what he believes his wife needs and what she is actually feeling. Essentially Verloc performs ideological violence on his wife—assuming she is in accord with him—as she about to perform literal violence on him.

The murder itself has the grotesque effect of seeming to establish agreement between the couple by silencing their differences. As Winnie stands by Verloc's dead body, both of them completely still, they are again close to "accord":

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Except for the fact that Mrs Verloc breathed these two would have been perfect in accord: that accord of prudent reserve without superfluous words, and sparing of signs, which had been the foundation of their respectable home life. For it had been respectable, covering by a decent reticence the problems that may arise in the practice of a secret profession and the commerce of shady wares. To the last its decorum had remained undisturbed by unseemly shrieks and other misplaced sincerities of conduct. And after the striking of the blow, this respectability was continued in immobility and silence. (198)

The description of them as “perfect in accord” recalls the earlier lack of accord, suggesting that this violence was necessary to create similarity between them. Given their previous discord, it seems like the killing was the precondition of their currently being (except for Winnie’s breathing) “perfect in accord,” and thus the novel indicates the violence of forcing individuals into homogeneous groups, whether reading publics or national publics. Yet even the accord in this passage is deceptively superficial, and as with the many instances of characters who might seem to belong to groups in this novel, Verloc and Winnie only appear to be alike: Winnie’s grotesque “accord” is with a corpse. Difference must be silenced (perhaps violently) in order to form community founded on the ideal of “prudent reserve,” that English ideal of moderation and self-control at “the foundation of their respectable home life”; this ideal of “reserve” represses undesirable aspects of identity—the “shady wares” of bodily desires and discursive violence that may bubble up to disrupt the “respectable” appearance of wholeness. By the end of this passage, the “decorum” valued in domestic England becomes almost grotesque, silencing the “unseemly shrieks and other misplaced sincerities of conduct” that might be expected to accompany such a violent death: a “decorous murder” grotesquely undermines the ideal of decorum itself. Finally, “respectability” can continue in “immobility and silence” only because one of them is dead, a fact that the decorous sentence represses but is so obvious that it completely disrupts the passage’s pretext of remaining respectable. Ultimately, the values that underwrite community—domesticity and decorum—are violent impositions. The novel’s cryptopornography, then, enacts an uncanny return of the repressed, of the violence (literal and discursive) that

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underlies these ideologies of group identity, both on the domestic and national level, even as the novel refuses any single reading, declining to perpetrate on the reader the violence it is critiquing.

Conrad's fiction has often raised questions about the politics of reading—are his novels conservative or subversive?—and *The Secret Agent* has been a particular crux of that debate. In addressing these questions, the content of his novels shouldn't distract us from the implications of their forms. This is the value of examining the grotesque in Conrad's practice: it illuminates both the representational content of his novels (the grotesques within them) and the ways of reading them (they represent grotesquely), and seems to resolve his ambivalence about narrative's creation of publics, both artistic and political. Resisting simplistic national types, Conrad presents his characters as mixed, and in also mixing narrative discourses, fragments the audience's response. In this way *The Secret Agent* suggests how the novel can undermine the rhetoric of universalism without participating in its own form of narrative coercion.

Notes

1. The type of analysis I am describing can also be found in the essays "Connoisseurs of Terror and the Political Aesthetics of Anarchism: *Nostromo* and *A Set of Six*" by Anthony Fothergill and "Reading *The Secret Agent* Now: The Press, the Police, the Premonition of Simulation" by Peter Lancelot Mallios.

2. See Anderson 22–32. His comments on the consumption of newspapers are also particularly interesting in this context. The newspaper is similar to the novel in effect but consumed as part of a daily ritual in which

each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. (35)

For how *The Secret Agent* satirizes the modern newspaper-reading public, see Peter Nohrnberg.

3. This definition is particularly indebted to Virginia Swain, who defines the grotesque as an improbable "fusion of different realms," "double, tense, and contradictory" (11), and to Geoffrey Galt Harpham's *On the Grotesque*, which defines it as a "co-presence," "the perception that something is illegitimately in something else" (13). Also influential are Bernard McElroy, Wolfgang Kayser, and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White.

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4. Conrad frequently uses the word simply to mean “repulsively obese.” See for instance the beginning of “Because of the Dollars,” where Davidson is first described as “stout, but [. . .] not grotesque” (*Stories* 506). However, even in Conrad’s first short story, “The Black Mate,” the word *grotesque* is applied to Captain Johns not only due to his appearance but also because he blindly swallows the discourse of spiritualism.

5. Geoffrey Harpham’s *One of Us* also sees oxymoron as the definitive figure of speech for Conrad’s style. Oxymoron “seem[s] to exceed or shatter the limits of ordinary common sense” (67) and “often suggests both a fantastic linguistic master and a failure to achieve even mere reference or coherence” (163).

6. Brian Shaffer has given perhaps the most complete and useful reading of pornography in the novel, but he ultimately concludes that the correspondence between “revolutionary politics and pornography” is used simply “to tarnish the glamour of subversive politics with the smuttiness of tawdry sex” (443), which seems too simple to be satisfactory for a novel that revels in contradiction. His corresponding conclusion that the novel also critiques the late-Victorian hysteria over sex and politics, satirizing the fear of “shady wares,” is more satisfying. Most other critics have mentioned the pornography shop only in passing. Rebecca Walkowitz, for instance, links the shop to the “visual propaganda of the city,” tying it into the novel’s thematics of “display” by which “natural” identity is revealed as “a performance of requisite effects” (44); the shop itself offers “the pretense of respectability” (46) and is thus one example of how the narrative reveals identity as “strategic display” (46). Joseph McLaughlin notes how the pornography shop commodifies sex in the same way that Soho’s ethnic restaurants commodify identity, draining the pleasure out of both: “In its commodified form, an exotic sexuality of the rubber stamp is an unstamped pleasure at best” (162). Both demonstrate the importance of pornography as display and artifice, particularly as they relate to identity.

7. In addition, Verloc initially took up residence in London on orders from a foreign power:

I’ve been charged with several missions to London while His Excellency Baron Stott-Wartenheim was still Ambassador in Paris. Then by His Excellency’s instructions I settled down in London. I am English. (22)

Verloc appends his simple assertion of his English essence almost parenthetically, as though it explains his reasons for settling in London, yet the preceding statement reveals that his presence there was directed by a foreign power. The foundations for his “English” identity consistently undermine its coherence as an identity category.

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8. For a more complete analysis of how imperial discourse underlies even British domestic narrative, see Edward Said's discussion of Austen's *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism* 84–97.

9. Joseph Boone, for instance, argues that the marriage plot in the English novel became “a metonymy for proper social order and sexual hierarchy that disguised the asymmetries of class and sex” (375). He traces this representational pattern from the Victorian period into modernism and sees an increasing questioning in modernism of the validity of these narratives. See also Anne McClintock, who similarly argues that family was used as a metaphor for nation in order to naturalize social hierarchy.

10. Conrad's play with the concept of nation as home continues as the Assistant Commissioner goes to meet the Home Secretary, whose name, Ethelred, is derived from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning ancestral home, dwelling, or native land.

11. Susan Jones points out this fact, explaining that the shop is an intermediary space between the London streets and the domestic milieu. Through this mixed space, the novel “illustrates the interdependence of public and private life in a society which ostensibly idealised the notion of home and domestic duty . . . as a sacrosanct and enclosed world protected from the public sphere” (200–01).

12. Sigel cites numerous examples of books published up until 1910 that show “the price kept visual pornography from all but the wealthy” (*Governing* 89). In fact, pornographers advertised by “mail[ing] out catalogues to likely buyers. The pornographers used the social register and the society pages to pick these clients.” Not until around the time that Conrad was writing did pornography even start to become available to the masses in the form of pornographic postcards.

13. Both Walkowitz and McLaughlin discuss the Assistant Commissioner's travels in Soho as instances of the instability and performativity of identity. However, whereas they emphasize this instability as an affirmation of freedom—McLaughlin calls it “a regression to a fluidity that turns out to be a type of transcendence” (153)—I am emphasizing its failure to provide a coherent foundation for identity. The result is much greater anxiety and uncertainty for the reader.

14. In the nineteenth century, the so-called Hicklin test was devised by the courts to demarcate the boundaries of obscene discourse. As summarized by Lord Chief Justice Cockburn, the Hicklin test used the following principal: “where a man publishes a work manifestly obscene, he must be taken to have

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had the intention which is implied from that act" (qtd. in Kendrick 122). The logic is circular: because the work is obscene, the intentions are obscene; because the intentions are obscene, the work is obscene. With no external criteria for obscenity, there were no clear boundaries for pornographic discourse. Nonetheless, the courts enforced a universal, unified (English) social standard.

15. The chief disagreement lay between the working classes and the ruling classes, as Lisa Sigel demonstrates in the following anecdote, particularly intriguing in relation to *The Secret Agent's* domestic porn shop:

Another defendant, Mr. Devenny, seemed accused as much for having his "daughter, a girl of 16," work at the shop as for selling [pornographic] postcards. Here again, the defendant stated that he did not see the cards as obscene. "I have never had a complaint before. I can't see they are filthy." The judge stated in response, "If you can't see it, and think they are fit for a girl to sell over the counter, of course, one forms one's own opinion about you." (*Governing* 150)

16. Susan Jones makes the similar argument that Conrad mixes genres in order to subvert their "less than radical strategies" (200), and that many of his later novels, including *The Secret Agent*, subvert the tropes of melodrama and sensation novels. Conrad's "creative impulse had always relied, to some extent, on a subversive treatment of popular genres, and his responses to them act as a structuring principle throughout the fiction" (199).

17. Conrad's fiction often emphasizes the breakdown of communication and consequently the breakdown of community. Edward Said has gone so far as to claim that Conrad "created an aesthetic principle" out of the fear of being misunderstood. Said notes that most of Conrad's stories are about people who fail to communicate yet continue to try, and "whose attempts to *impress* others compound, rather than reduce, the original sense of isolation" (*Reflections* 180).

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Joyce's Reading Bodies and the Kinesthetics of the Modernist Novel

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James Joyce famously described *Ulysses* as an “epic of the human body,” and many of his early and influential readers have obligingly emphasized the significance of the organs associated with each episode in Joyce’s schemas.¹ Initial reviewers less enchanted with Joyce’s opinions also focused on bodies and somatic responses, describing the novel as “indecent,” “vile,” “scatological,” and “an ordinary emetic” (Brooker 26–27). Fears of the text’s effects on the bodies of readers contributed to bans on Joyce’s works, for as Katherine Mullin points out, a “kinetic model of reading was assumed by most social purity campaigners. . . . The theory that young people were drawn to mimic what they read found constant reiteration” (34–35).² In the US obscenity case against *Ulysses* publishers Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, both prosecution and defense suggested that a text produces corporeal effects. The defense attorney, John Quinn, gave as an exhibit the physical response of Assistant District Attorney Joseph Forrester to a reading of “Nausicaa”—“Just look at him, still gasping for breath at the conclusion of the denunciation, his face distorted with rage”—using somatic evidence to argue that far from filling Forrester with “lewd desires” or sending him “to the arms of a whore,” *Ulysses* deterred such behavior (Brooker 20). Quinn lost the case, but US District Judge John Woolsey agreed with him when he overturned the ban in 1933, claiming “whilst in many places the effect of *Ulysses* on the reader undoubtedly is somewhat emetic, nowhere does it tend to be an aphrodi-

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siaic" ("Court Lifts Ban"). *Ulysses* was published in the US because it was believed to produce the "right" sorts of effects on reading bodies.

The bodily experiences of these early readers, however humorous in retrospect, indicates a sensitivity to Joyce's new techniques in *Ulysses*. More recent critics, rejecting the censoring tendencies of both emetic and aphrodisiac models, may also overlook ways Joyce's text depicts moving bodies and encourages somatic responses from readers. Poststructural theories postulate the instability of text, author, and reader and thereby also discourage a generalized discussion of the effects of texts on reading bodies, which are difficult to substantiate and certainly not universal. Still, several textual strategies in *Ulysses* do engage the kinesthetic potential of language, to borrow a term common to three influential fields in the early twentieth century: physical culture, social purity, and psychological aesthetics. In physical culture, especially the new art of modern dance, kinesthesia was theorized as a modern modality of perception; influential dance theorist Rudolph Laban defined it as "the sense by which we perceive muscular effort, movement, and position in space" (111).³ Social purity's model of kinetic reading and mimicry and its effectiveness in banning Joyce and sparking his parodic humor have been detailed by Katherine Mullin. Kinesthetic responses to art were also the focus of the contemporaneous field of psychological aesthetics, an overlooked but significant aspect of modernist aesthetic theory. Studies in psychological aesthetics suggested that a kinesthetic sense enabled perception of the traces of bodies, both the artist's and subject's, in various art forms: the record of the brush stroke on the canvas, the impression of the sculptor's hands on clay, or the way a still figure in painting, photography, or sculpture seems captured in motion. Applied to literature by Vernon Lee (1856–1935), psychological aesthetics examined the impact of language on reading bodies and constitutes part of the prehistory of reader-response criticism. Kinesthetic readings attend to how a text encodes the gestures and motions of characters, the bodies that produce words, and the movements required by speech.

The aesthetic questions pondered by both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* echo contemporaneous debates in psychological aesthetics concerning the body's role in perceiving art. Stephen explicitly discusses "kinetic" and "static" apperception in the section of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that is frequently cited as evidence of Joyce's aesthetics and theory of the novel. Although Joyce presents Stephen's

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theories ironically, the discussion nonetheless positions embodiment as a central concern of Joycean aesthetics. Especially in the early chapters of *Ulysses*, Stephen and Bloom both model reading strategies that attend to how syntax, rhythm, and phonic structures engage bodies. The characters' kinesthetic readings adapt techniques frequently used in poetry analysis to a variety of texts and thus offer instructions for how to read *Ulysses*.⁴ While novelistic versions of these strategies are not specific to Joyce or even modernist novels, they enable new readings of some famous and controversial passages in *Ulysses*. Kinesthetic readings are also particularly useful for engaging the modernist novel's self-consciousness of literary convention and desire to revivify language.

Stephen's theories of art and Vernon Lee's psychological aesthetics

Stephen's famous analysis of "static" and "kinetic" responses to art in *A Portrait* echoes the primary concerns of psychological aesthetics. Stephen informs his friend Lynch that art should "arrest" the mind rather than "awaken an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical" such as the "improper" responses of "desire or loathing" (*Portrait* 180–81). The aesthetic theories of college-aged Stephen have been read as Joyce's own statement on aesthetics, a conflation of author and his (undeniably autobiographical) character that can be traced back to Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses*, the first book on the novel. Gilbert suggests that *Ulysses* fulfills the theory articulated by Stephen: "The artist's aim, then, is to ban kinetic feelings from his readers' minds, and in *Ulysses* we find the ideal silent stasis of the artist" (31).⁵ But Joyce actually treats Stephen and his lofty philosophizing ironically at the end of *A Portrait* and throughout *Ulysses*; Stephen's own body undermines his claims to aesthetic stasis, an important irony often missed by autobiographical readings of the character.⁶

Bodily gestures coded with "desire or loathing" punctuate Stephen's discourse even as he claims to exclude such feelings from aesthetics. For instance, Lynch "rubbed both his hands over his groins" (*Portrait* 180) and Stephen "laid his hand on Lynch's thick tweed sleeve" while "blushing slightly" (181), most likely an indication of erotic desire but definitely a physiological sign of, to borrow Stephen's terminology, "an emotion

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which is kinetic.”⁷ Stephen delivers his assertions of stasis using the language of bodies and movement. He mentions “two ways out,” insists “Aquinas will carry me along the line,” describes how “you pass from point to point,” refers to a “first step in the direction of truth,” and asks Lynch, “Are you following?” When Stephen begins, “Let us take woman,” Lynch calls attention to the kinetic valences of “take” in the motions of desire, repeating “fervently,” “Let us take her!” The bodies of the boys are in constant motion as they walk through Dublin and encounter the urban disruptions that make the argument difficult to “follow.”⁸ As Stephen concludes his “hypothesis,” a “dray laden with old iron” prevents him from continuing, and Lynch covers his ears and swears until the vehicle passes (184). Even the passage’s examples of art, the “naked” *Venus of Praxiteles* and a song titled “Tell, My Tongue, of the Mystery of Christ’s Glorious Body” invoke the power of bodies (181).⁹ Finally the boys take cover from the rain at the National Library, where Stephen’s “beloved” distracts them from their conversation. The argument ends not with a final definitive claim to stasis but with a physical attraction that belies Stephen’s assertion that desire is “excited by improper esthetic means” (181).

Stephen’s aesthetic discussions are usually positioned in relation to the theorists he cites: Goethe, Lessing, Aristotle, Aquinas, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde.¹⁰ Yet his closing comments to Lynch about “the beautiful” more closely resemble the theories of Vernon Lee, a central figure in psychological aesthetics. Born in Britain as Violet Paget, Lee spent most of her life writing aesthetic theory, criticism, and fiction in Italy.¹¹ Her book *The Beautiful*, published just before the serialization of Joyce’s *Portrait*, describes the “active process” (31) of perceiving “*relation*, the length and direction of a line” (33) in art: “this *making up of shapes*, this grasping or taking in of their constituent relations” (31). Stephen describes a similar motion: “you pass from point to point, led by its formal lines; you apprehend it as balanced part against part within its limits; you feel the rhythm of its structure” (*Portrait* 187). Lee emphasizes that the perception of art involves “changes of the bodily balance, the breathing and heart-beat . . . the participation of bodily functions” (*The Beautiful* 75). Stephen claims that “proper” art does not involve the body, yet he figures “esthetic pleasure” as “a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani . . . called the enchantment of the heart” (*Portrait* 188). In the eighteenth century Galvani “described the pause in a frog’s heartbeat when the frog’s heart was pierced with a needle” (188n2).

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Stephen thus describes his ideal “spiritual state” and aesthetic “stasis” with reference to bodily states.

For Vernon Lee and other theorists in early twentieth-century psychological aesthetics, art also pierces the body. A devoted student of Pater, Lee followed her mentor’s interest in the aesthetic response of the individual perceiver: “What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me?” (Pater viii). Lee’s innovation was to respond to these questions of aesthetic apperception using developments in psychology and physiology, including studies of emotion by William James and Carl Lange.¹² The still-respected James-Lange theory claims that bodily changes (such as the trembling of fear) are not expressions of emotion; instead, the experience of emotion is actually produced by physiological responses to external stimuli. For Lee, the theory implies that the “esthetic pleasure” (to borrow Stephen’s term) accompanying aesthetic apperception is, like other emotions, produced by kinetic and bodily experiences. In *Beauty and Ugliness* she explains these bodily responses to art with reference to studies of empathy by two German experimental psychologists, Karl Groos and Theodor Lipps. Groos and Lipps, she writes, claim that empathy, the imaginative participation in the subjective experience of another, produces an “inner mimicry” or bodily “imitation” (23). Applying the idea to art, Lee suggests that the body unconsciously imitates the forms and motions of art when experiencing “aesthetic emotion” (358).

The corporal imitation of art, according to Lee, is evident in “the kinesthetic accompaniments of aesthetic perception,” which include changes in pulse rate, breathing patterns, muscular tensions, and bodily feelings of balance and motion (358). She derives many of these kinesthetic indicators from experiments with her lover Kit Anstruther-Thomson, who, according to Lee, possessed a particularly acute sense of aesthetic empathy.¹³ Lee analyzed Anstruther-Thomson’s descriptions of kinesthetic responses to objects as diverse as paintings and furniture. In a passage ridiculed by Lee’s biographer Vineta Colby (157), Anstruther-Thomson devotes four pages to her perception of a chair:

While seeing this chair, there happen movements of the two eyes, of the head, and of the thorax, and balancing movements in the back. . . . The chair is a bilateral object, so the two eyes are equally active. They meet the two legs of the chair at the ground

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and run up both sides simultaneously. There is a feeling as if the width of the chair were pulling the two eyes wide apart during this process of following the upward line of the chair.

(*Beauty and Ugliness* 163–67)

Perhaps poking fun at such lines of aesthetic interrogation, Joyce presents Stephen considering “*Is a chair finely made tragic or comic?*” (*Portrait* 188). If the kinesthetic experience of a chair seems implausible, many of Lee’s descriptions of bodily adjustments, eye movements, muscular reactions, and other somatic responses to art would later be corroborated by the development of sensitive equipment for physiological monitoring.

Lee used advances in psychology and physiology to reinterpret Paterian aesthetics for modernism, yet she is not usually associated with modernist aesthetics, in part because she was marginalized as a lesbian in a male-dominated discipline.¹⁴ Both Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot knew of Lee’s work; Pound excised from an early draft of *The Waste Land* a reference to the “soapy sea / Of Symonds—Walter Pater—Vernon Lee” (27). Wyndham Lewis declared, “To read [Vernon Lee’s] pages is like watching a person of some intelligence administering electric shocks to herself” (111).¹⁵ Lee actually postulates a perceiver’s “immediate shock of passive and (as much as smell and taste) bodily pleasure” that may be received from a work of art (*The Beautiful* 27). Such “shocks” of “bodily pleasure” were part of a trend in the aesthetics of the day, applied to music in Edmund Gurney’s *The Power of Sound*, to the visual arts in Adolf von Hildebrand’s *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, and especially to film in Hugo Münsterberg’s *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*. In fact, Lee’s ideas were so widespread and current that the American art historian Bernard Berenson accused Lee of plagiarism, though he later acknowledged there was little basis for this claim (Colby 156–67).

Lee’s major contribution to modernist aesthetic theory was her application of psychological aesthetics to literature. She postulated that readers experience “muscular adjustments of the inner and auditive apparatus, as well as obvious sensations in the vocal parts when we ourselves produce, and often when we merely think of, [sounds]” (*The Beautiful* 36). She predicted the results produced almost a century later by “elaborate mechanical and electrographic experiments designed to test the muscular responses (of larynx, pharynx, tongue, palate, lips, and so on) during silent reading” (Stewart 129).¹⁶ The effect of language on reading bodies was

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not a direct imitation or inner mimicry, as she had postulated for visual artworks; the response of readers involves “the interpretation of form according to the facts of our own inner experience, the attribution to form of modes of being, moving, and feeling similar to our own” (*Beauty and Ugliness* 17). Human experiences and motions infuse human texts:

Such projection of *ourselves* into external objects . . . is not merely manifest throughout all poetry, where it borders on and overlaps moral and dramatic sympathy, but is at the bottom of numberless words and expressions whose daily use has made us overlook this special peculiarity.¹⁷ (18)

Lee’s examples, “hills *roll*” and “mountains *rise*” (18) reveal that “projection” is not simply the empathy readers might develop for characters. Hills and mountains do not perceptibly move, but the viewer’s eyes seem to roll over a hilly landscape or rise when encountering a mountain. Stephen Dedalus’s phrases “take woman” and “are you following” similarly attribute human movements to intellectual processes. This projection of human motion into art is, Lee claimed, “the central discovery of modern aesthetics” (17).

The title of Lee’s later work, *The Handling of Words*, figures the capacity to manipulate language as a bodily process located primarily in the hand that writes, the mouth that speaks, and the eye that reads. Lee’s discussion of “literary psychology” in *Handling* predicts reader-response and formalist criticisms by I. A. Richards, Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Iser, and Roland Barthes.¹⁸ Lee also anticipates queer theorists, such as Ladelle McWhorter, who focus on the bodily practices and pleasures that accompany even the “act of reading” and that destabilize oppressive sexual categories.¹⁹ Her kinesthetic theories demonstrate a modernist interest in bodily responses to literary form that provides a new context for discussions of Joyce’s linguistic effects by Garrett Stewart and Derek Attridge, among others. Examining phonemic phenomena, especially the transegmental drift, Stewart theorizes a “phonotext” that negotiates the tension between the graphic and aural properties of language produced by any reading event: “A word is read with no presumption that a voice either preceded that textual mark or can be elicited from it. Yet a voice is brought *to* it” (135). Lee emphasizes the “community of experience of Reader and Writer,” claiming that literature “plays” on the reader and initiates a “movement as *pace and weight, impact and rhythm*” (*Handling*

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131–32).²⁰ The rhythms of language are an accepted concern of literary criticism, although a silent reader certainly might not “hear” meter. A less conventional leap from graphic mark on a page to the movement, pace, weight, and impact of reading suggests a materiality of the word best experienced by an oral, aural, or phonotextual reading.²¹ Derek Attridge postulates a similar engagement with *Ulysses*, “When we read (aloud or with a mental image of sound)” (*Peculiar* 152). He asks the same questions of Joyce’s language that were addressed by psychological aesthetics a century ago:

And how is it that language, in the form of literary writing, can produce a similar effect upon the reader—if not an actual physical response, at least an intensity and immediacy of reaction which comes close to physical sensation? (*Joyce Effects* 64)

Mouthing “Proteus”

One of Joyce’s kinesthetic strategies, particularly evident in “Proteus,” attempts to make language mimetic of human movement in the way that onomatopoeia suggests words may sound like what they mean. In his reading of onomatopoeia in “Sirens,” Attridge argues that the term literary criticism uses to refer to “what appears to be language functioning unproblematically as direct imitation of the real world” is actually a projection of human experience onto language, much like Vernon Lee’s conventional metaphor “hills rise” (*Peculiar* 136). The seemingly unproblematic imitation of sound requires an interpretive leap from “black marks on the page” to voicing, which relies on the reader’s knowledge of the conventions of the “graphological system” of written language and the “phonological system” of spoken language, as well as the conventions that the sounding of a word resembles a category of other sounds in the world (138). Bloom’s fart, “Pprrpffrrppffff,” at the conclusion of “Sirens” is an example of nonlexical onomatopoeia, which adopts the phonetic characteristics of language to imitate sounds without producing familiar words, as lexical onomatopoeia does (137–38). Readers depend on their knowledge of how a set of letters conventionally sounds in a recognizable word not only to understand “Pprrpffrrppffff” as the sound of passing wind but also to pronounce every word. There is a lot of convention behind the idea that *crush*, spoken by any speaker, sounds like an object

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being crushed. If readers may recognize printed words as a mimesis of sound, they might similarly use the conventions of graphological and phonological language to recognize a similar relationship between the meaning of a word and what it feels like to pronounce that word.

In *Ulysses* mimetic tropes frequently emphasize speech patterns and rhythms, the movements of lips, or the flow of air through the mouth. "Proteus," the third episode of *Ulysses*, not only revisits Stephen's aesthetic ideas from *A Portrait* but theorizes kinesthetic literary techniques as it features processes of creative composition, including reading, reciting, and writing. The early episodes of *Ulysses*, with plentiful references to reading and writing, model kinesthetic techniques as hints for readers of the novel. Both Joyce and his critics associate "Proteus" with the technique of interior monologue, a less experimental style than "Sirens" and later episodes. Therefore, finding innovative kinesthetic techniques in "Proteus"'s interior monologue complicates usual interpretations. "Proteus" opens with Stephen "reading" Sandymount Strand and reflecting that the sense of sight, the "modality of the visible," must be supplemented by a "modality of the audible." Applied to writing, which frequently occupies Stephen's mind, the passage suggests that the visible text must be augmented by the aural component of words, or the phonotext.²² Stephen claims that the limitations of the eyes are verified by both sound and touch, but especially the sense of being "in bodies," that is, the kinesthetic sense (3.4). One way of knowing that material objects exist is by encountering them with the body, "By knocking his scone against them, sure" (3.5–6).

Immediately after his reflections on the visible, audible, and kinesthetic, Stephen shuts his eyes, refusing dependence on sight and experiencing the world in body: "to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells" (3.10). The phrase is a conventional example of lexical onomatopoeia; many English speakers would agree that "crush crackling" imitates the sounds of shells being broken under boots. The iambs of the phrase also imitate a two-beat walking or marching motion, or so Stephen suggests when the sounds and physical sensations of his walk over the shells prompt him to recite two lines of a verse: "Won't you come to Sandymount, / Madeline the mare?" (3.21–22). Recognizing that each line opens with an upbeat followed by iambs, he theorizes a relationship between poetic rhythm and bodily movement: "Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. Acatalectic tetrameter of iambs marching" (3.23–24). Stephen's metaphor, "iambs marching," indicates that lines composed of feet (appropriately named) with an unstressed followed by

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one stressed syllable imitate the rhythms of human marching. He connects human motion to literary form as did Vernon Lee, by projecting human experience onto art. Moreover, the fluctuating pronouns of "you see" and "I hear," immediately following the third-person voice ("to hear his boots") emphasize the direct address to the reader; "you see" becomes *you see the text while I hear myself walking*, or *you see the march I hear*, or *you see* and understand that *I* am teaching you a new theory of the relationship between language and movement. Readers are asked to consider what they are seeing, the text, and how they might experience sound and movement while reading.

Poetic rhythm is intertwined with Stephen's bodily motions in the many instances when he recites poetry and song lyrics or composes lines in his head that influence his movements through Dublin. As Stephen continues to scan his walk along Sandymount, he mentally composes another rhyme (this one to Mulligan's critical aunt), and once again, "His feet marched in sudden proud rhythm over the sand furrows" (3.205). When Stephen finally sits and writes a poem on a scrap of paper, the motions of his body are still centrally figured. He writes, "He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss" (3.397-98). As Don Gifford notes (62), the composition echoes the last stanza of Douglas Hyde's translation from the Irish of "My Grief on the Sea" (31).²³ Gifford describes Stephen's "souped-up (Canting Academy) version" (62), but, crucially, the differences between Stephen's piece and Hyde's translation (which is, of course, a pre-existing folk song) partially relate to bodily movement. Stephen's version emphasizes body parts (eyes, blood, mouth) and kinetic movement (comes, bloodying, kiss). The lover becomes a vampire, a creature that feeds on the blood of another living body, and also perhaps a figure for the way literature feeds on or borrows from other works. Stephen considers revising the final line to "mouth to her kiss" but decides one "mouth" is not enough: "Must be two of em. Glue em well. Mouth to her mouth's kiss." The discursive register has shifted from the literary to the colloquial as Stephen uses the abbreviated idioms of spoken language (*em* for *them*). Since he is not speaking to another person figured in the text, the shift may indicate that he is speaking aloud to himself. Or he may be revealing that he needs two instances of the letter *m*, "two of em," to produce consonance and "glue" the line and mouths together. In both readings, the line and his thoughts

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about it emphasize the connection between the word and the mouth, the organ that produces language.

Shifting again out of the inner or spoken monologue to a third-person description of Stephen in the process of composition, the text reveals that his mouth is, in fact, moving while he writes poetry:

His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her
moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing
breath, unspeched: ooeeehah: roar of cataractic planets, globed,
blazing, roaring wayawayawayawayaway. (3.403–06)

Beginning in third-person narrative (“His lips”), the text appears to become a transcription of Stephen’s sounding after the first colon. Both “ooeeehah” and “wayawayawayawayaway” are examples of nonlexical onomatopoeia that indicate Stephen is testing vowel sounds for his poem. The phonetic qualities of the words chosen to describe Stephen composing mimic the motions of his mouth. Stewart points to features of the phonotext that layer meaning in the phrase: “his lips lipped” becomes “[hi] s’lip s’lipped” through transegmental drift (251). It is difficult to pronounce the repeated plosives of “His lips lipped” without slipping up.²⁴ The *p* sound in *lips* is a voiceless bilabial (two-lipped) plosive that requires an unaspirated stop in the airflow; that is, the *p*s require a good deal of lip work to pronounce. The phrase not only establishes meaning through its phonotext, it also mimics the movements of Stephen’s mouth. Of course, silent readers do not need to move their mouths, but knowing the conventions surrounding English pronunciation may help the reader “feel” or create a mental image of the motion of speech just as these rules help a reader “hear” the onomatopoeia in “crackling” and “ooeeehah.” The passage even figures words as “fleshless lips of air” that require Stephen’s “mouthing” to return them to the flesh and body. When Stephen is satisfied that the lines produce a kinesthetic feeling of “roaring wayawayawayaway,” he decides to write his “moulded” breath onto a corner of the letter about “Hoof and Mouth Disease” written by Deasy in the earlier episode, “Nestor.” The letter provides yet another valence to Stephen’s repetition of the word *mouth* and experimentation with the mouthing of words.

Throughout “Proteus,” Stephen both theorizes and models kinesthetic approaches to language. His reading of the Strand establishes him as a figure for the reader of the novel and provides evidence for his ideas

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about the kinesthetic possibilities of language. He composes while moving and marches to an iambic rhythm. He plays with the mouthing of words until they are mimetic of not only the sounds but the physical motions of reading aloud, and only then does he write them down.

Bloom's kinesthetic readings and compositions

Although Stephen is usually cited as the poet figure of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom also has aspirations to authorship and models kinesthetic engagement with language. He is introduced as both a reader, mirroring readers of the novel, and potential author in "Calypso," the episode that follows "Proteus." Bloom thinks, "Might manage a sketch" for the magazine *Titbits*, which he is reading on the toilet. The scene is a humorous example of a kinesthetic reading; his bowel movement paces his progress through the article: "Quietly he read, restraining himself, the first column . . . he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone" (4.506–17). Bloom's initial restraint and delay of gratification is recorded textually in repetitive short phrases, separated by commas. The release of his bowels not only releases the sentence from commas and other grammatical constraints but also undoes inhibitions against discussing yesterday's constipation in a novel. The text mimes the bodily movements or processes it records just as an onomatopoetic word mimics the sounds it describes. The scene ends as Bloom wipes himself with the magazine, a joke about the quality of magazine literature, but also a gesture that literally positions text in an orifice of his body. Writing and reading merge with bodily creativity as Bloom's process of defecation influences the text and Bloom makes his first literary mark with a fecal period.

If Bloom's approach to *Titbits* playfully models kinesthetic techniques, his later response to the novel *Sweets of Sin* in "Wandering Rocks" parodies the kinetic model assumed by the turn-of-the-century social purity movement. This model claimed that texts produce sexual urges and physical desires that would induce readers to mimic what they read. The theory is articulated in social purity tracts like Anthony Comstock's *Traps for the Young* (1883): "We assimilate what we read. The pages of printed matter become our companions. . . . They are constant attendants to quicken thought and influence action" (qtd. in Mullin 32). Bloom's exaggerated response to the stereotypically titled *Sweets of Sin* parodies

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the fears of the purists and censors; the book does not “influence” him to find a lover, because his body undergoes physiological changes associated with an erotic encounter as he stands reading: “Warmth showered gently over him, cowing his flesh. Flesh yielded amply amid rumpled clothes: whites of eyes swooning up. His nostrils arched themselves for prey . . . Feel! Press! Cherished! Sulphur dung of lions” (10.619–23). Bloom’s flesh does not literally yield “amid rumpled clothes” at the bookstall, and the incongruous reference to “dung of lions” implies that the description of his response is all “dung.” While the book does not send Bloom hunting for sexual “prey,” this is precisely the fear of the social purists whose “kinetic model of reading” would, in fact, help to get *Ulysses* on the list of banned books.

Another reading scene in the newspaper offices of “Aeolus” depicts more realistic kinesthetic engagements with language and particularly the labor and material processes involved in making print. Bloom practices the work of a proofer, using a sentence for a spelling test:

It is amusing to view the unpar one ar alleled embarra two ars
is it? double ess ment of a harassed pedlar while gauging au the
symmetry with a y of a peeled pear under a cemetery wall. Silly
isn't it? Cemetery put in of course on account of the symmetry.
(7.166–70)

Rather than a grammatical sentence, the text records Bloom’s work to spell the words and becomes a version of nonlexical onomatopoeia, similar to Stephen’s “ooeeehah.” Readers understand the passage only if they understand the conventions of written and spoken language that Bloom manipulates and the idiosyncrasies of those conventions: words are easily misspelled due to the discrepancy between spoken and written language (we say *geyj* but spell *gauge*). If the spelling game is “silly,” it is also “amusing” to play with language, to produce the consonance of “pedlar” and “peeled pear” or “symmetry” and “cemetery” while recognizing the “symmetry” of the *es* in “cemetery.”

Slightly later, Bloom watches the typesetters place type backward and remembers his father reading Hebrew “backwards with his finger,” yet another example of an embodied, rhythmic reading practice. Bloom practices the typesetters’ work with the name of his recently deceased friend, “mangiD kcirtaP,” as if he were setting the type for the account of the funeral that would be printed, albeit inaccurately, in the newspaper.

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He decides it is a difficult job: "Seems to see with his fingers" just as his father seemed to read with his finger (7.215–16). The scene calls attention to the way bodies engage with language and labor to produce texts, as it emphasizes the mortality of those bodies. Bloom's father and Patrick Dignam died due to suicide and alcoholism respectively and can no longer work with language.

Adding to Bloom's identity as reader and newspaper man, "Ithaca" declares him to be a "kinetic poet." He had played with anagrams in his youth ("Old Ollebo, M. P."). He also sent Molly an "acrostic upon the abbreviation of his first name," a poem in which the first letter of every line spells POLDY (17. 410–11). Bloom's poetry may be "kinetic" because, following Stephen's definition in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he hoped to produce a physical response in Molly with the acrostic. The term also points to the fact that such poems are created with attention to the arrangement of letters, as in the labor of the proofer and typesetter in "Eolus."

Bloom actually composes a verse in "Lestrygonians," an episode that Joyce associates with the bodily process of "peristalsis" in the schema he wrote for Stuart Gilbert. Bloom composes a verse while feeding the seagulls near the Liffey: "*The hungry famished gull / Flaps o'er the waters dull*" (8.62–63). Bloom's simple rhyme in iambic trimeter is not usually associated with Stephen's interest in iambs or his composition/plagiarism in "Proteus," but both record the flight of a bird or batlike figure over the sea. Just as Stephen considers the nature of poetic rhythm while composing on Sandymount Strand, Bloom thinks, "That is how poets write, the similar sounds," or in the case of Shakespeare's blank verse, "The flow of the language it is" (8.64–65). The description of "flowing language" is another example of what Vernon Lee understood as the projection of human movement into phrases. Words only seem to "flow" like the River Liffey below Bloom when a construction is easy to say and rhythmic. Immediately after quoting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (further evidence of Bloom's status as reader), he hears a peddler "—Two apples a penny! Two for a penny!" (8.69). The peddler's chant is a "flowing" phrase like Bloom's rhyme and the *Hamlet* quote. The repetition of "two" and the "ap" sounds of "app(les)" and "a'p(enny)" and elision of (apple) *s'a* and (fo) *r'a* make it feel easy to pronounce. The overheard peddler adds the sound and kinesthetic experience of spoken language into Bloom's consideration of "how poets write."

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In scenes featuring acts of reading and composition, the text calls attention to the bodies that produce words and influences the movements of those bodies. Stephen and Bloom model aural or phonotextual engagements with language in a manner that is suggestive of new reading techniques for *Ulysses*. Their hints encourage readers to recognize that language produces a mimesis of bodily experiences in scenes throughout the novel. Bloom's idea of a poetic "flow of the language" in "Lystrygonians" influences the description of an imagined bath in "Lotus Eaters." The daydream is initially figured in short sentences and monosyllabic words that apparently mime Bloom's first-person thoughts: "Enjoy a bath now. . . . This is my body" (5.565–66). The narrative switches to the third person, and the sentences become longer, stretching out on the page like his imagined body in the water: "his navel, bud of flesh: and saw the dark tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower" (5.570–72). The buoyant movements of the phallus, transformed into a lotus flower, are suggested by the repetition of the word "floating" and the five *fl* consonant clusters in "flesh," "floating," and "flower." The alliteration indicates that the image of the penis has produced an obsessive thought pattern akin to a drugged, opiate experience—as it calls attention to the aural character of language. The *fl* cluster (called the voiceless fricative liquid in phonetics) is one of the few speech sounds produced without obstruction of the vocal tract. Its repetition encourages a *flow* of air through the mouth and reproduces the feeling of watery motion. Not lexical onomatopoeia that would feature words imitating the sound of water flowing or splashing, the words here mimic the human motion being described. They do so by reproducing the quality of the motion in the movements of air through the mouth, either while reading aloud or with a mental image of the sounds of words.

Similar phonotextual structures mimetically record the movements or physical experiences of other characters in addition to Stephen and Bloom, and two final examples will illustrate the pervasiveness of kinesthetic techniques in the novel. At the opening of "Nestor," Stephen is teaching a history class and asks one of the schoolboys, Armstrong: "Do you know anything about Pyrrhus?" (2.21). As Armstrong gropes for an answer and the class and the reader wait, the text diverts to a description of the student's mouth to figure the wait time: "Crumbs adhered to the tissue of his lips" (2.24). Armstrong's lips, in addition to bearing evidence

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of a recent snack of fig rolls, are organs of language production, and words might seem to adhere to the mouth when we cannot answer a question. A similar meaning would be produced by the shorter sentence, "Crumbs adhered to his lips," but adding "the tissue" also adds more flesh to the phrase and increases the time it would take to speak or read with a sense of the phonotext. When Armstrong finally does speak, his costly answer, rather than giving the textbook information Stephen demands, develops from an associative logic based on the similarity of sounds: "Pyrrhus, a pier" (2.26). Further emphasizing the plosive "p" consonant in "lips," Armstrong uses the similarity in sounds as a way of making meaning rather than the common historical or biographical construction of knowledge through language.

Finally, kinesthetic techniques that figure gesture and mimic movement occur prominently in Buck Mulligan's parody of the liturgy at the opening of the novel. This scene features spoken language that is so conventionally associated with specific gestures that literary uses of those phrases also invoke images of movement. Mulligan performs as a priest using his morning shaving bowl as a prop and positioning Stephen as annoyed participant and unbelieving congregation. Mulligan intones the entrance or *Introit* of the Mass in Latin "*Introibo ad altare Dei*" (I go to the altar of God), and the familiar ritual phrase reveals that his gesture of lifting the shaving bowl is actually a parody of the blessing of the chalice. Mulligan's next gesture is to make "rapid crosses in the air" over Stephen, and although the movement is accompanied by a "gurgling in his throat" rather than the appropriate language, it is clear that this is a parody of a blessing (1.5–17). His performance demonstrates that rituals, whether or not they are treated as sacred, connect language to gesture, and a novel can deploy this familiar association to figure movement in the text.

The movements of Mulligan's mouth, in the process of being shaven, are also emphasized in the parodic liturgy, especially in his unpriestly oath, "blood and ounds." Referencing the crucified body of Christ as honored in the Mass, the oath drops the *w* of the sacrilegious phrase *blood and wounds*, presumably due to the difficulty of pronouncing the bilabial glide *w* after the voiced stop of *d*. Included in a written text, the oath invokes the voicing of the phrase, the history of vocalizations that produced it, and the role of the movements of the mouth in this history ("blood and wounds" becomes "blood and ounds").²⁵ The oath encourages readers to acknowledge the sound associated with words and the effort of pronouncing those sounds; to both listen and feel the phonotext. As the first

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scene of the novel, Mulligan's parodic mass performs a choreography that resists, and thereby emphasizes, the conventional gestures associated with language and how these gestures, including movements of the mouth, influence the construction of meaning.²⁶

In keeping with new theories in psychological aesthetics at the turn of the century, *Ulysses* binds language to its source in human bodies and depicts the somatic effects of words on characters when they read, compose, or use texts in various ways.²⁷ Texts figured in the novel, including recited poems, original compositions, magazines like *Titbits*, newsprint, history textbooks, and the liturgy, can serve as choreographic scripts that suggest possible voicings, gestures, or movements of characters. Just as conventional onomatopoeia asks readers to recognize printed words imitating sounds, mimetic tropes emphasizing speech patterns and rhythms, the movements of the lips, or the flow of air through the mouth might ask readers to recognize how words imitate bodily processes and motions. Vernon Lee's theories of psychological aesthetics claimed that literature and other art forms produce a bodily mimesis that is responsible for aesthetic emotion, an early twentieth-century belief in kinetic readings shared with unlikely companions, the social purists and physical culturists. Both Stephen and Bloom model bodily engagements with language, often in deliberate parody of the fears of social purists. Especially in the early episodes, they theorize and teach kinesthetic approaches to readers of *Ulysses*. If these strategies become increasingly useful in later, more experimental episodes, such body work is essential to *Finnegans Wake*, where the language both emanates from and constructs the first book's central immobile body, from "humptyhillhead" to "tumptytumtoes" (3.20–21).²⁸ The kinesthetic play that makes these words mime the physical features they describe also gives body to Stephen's "lips lipped" and "mouth moulded" and Bloom's "floating flower."

Notes

1. See Frank Budgen and Richard Ellmann. Ellmann claims that Joyce viewed the mind as "profoundly physical, containing all the organs of the body" (76). Budgen and Ellmann, among other early Joyce scholars, fused biographical and literary evidence and privileged Joyce's own claims about the novel, as Joseph Brooker points out.

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2. The social purity movement was imported to Ireland from Britain, where it originated in the radical campaign led by Josephine Butler to defend the civil liberties of prostitute women in the 1870s. By 1885, when the National Vigilance Association was founded, the movement had become conservative and regulationist (Mullin 22–23).

3. See my essay “Posing Modernism” for a discussion of physical culture’s idea of kinesthesia as a sensitivity for bodily motion, physical effort, spatial positioning, and pain.

4. Elaine Scarry differentiates the sensory and mimetic content of poetry from that of the novel in her distinction between the “immediate sensory content” of a painting, the “delayed sensory content” of a musical score or play script, and the “mimetic content” of literature (6). She writes:

Both narrative prose and poetry devote themselves centrally to mimetic perception, but poetry retains a strong engagement with delayed perception, the second category: like the musical score, its sequence of printed signs contains a set of instructions for the production of actual sound; the page does not itself sing but exists forever on the verge of song. Poetry—again unlike narrative—even has immediate sensory content, since the visual disposition of the lines and stanzas produce an at once apprehensible visual rhythm that is a prelude to, or rehearsal for, or promise of, the beautiful regulation of sound to come. (7)

Scarry’s framework and discussion of the mimetic work of language are useful, but I suggest that *Ulysses*, other novels, and many different texts offer varieties of sensory content.

5. See Brooker’s description of critical responses to this passage (64). Brooker himself encourages a “kinetic” mode of reading (21), but he does not detail methods or offer analysis supported by such readings. Michael Patrick Gillespie also points out that critics tend to dissect Stephen Dedalus’s proclamations about art in an attempt to decipher Joyce’s aesthetic theory. My “dissections” do not make claims about Joyce’s own theory but show how Stephen’s arguments adopt the language of contemporaneous aesthetic discussions.

6. David Trotter, for example, reads Stephen’s analysis as an ironic statement on his faulty aesthetics, but he associates the conversation with the tension between naturalism and symbolism in the novel rather than the more obvious question of embodied or static responses to art (75).

7. The gesture of touching the arm of another man appears again in *A Portrait* when Stephen’s friend Cranly “seized his arm” and Stephen was “thrilled by

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his touch" (218). The touch is replayed throughout *Ulysses* in Stephen's encounters with Mulligan, Bloom, and other male characters. In *Proteus* Stephen remembers, "Cranly's arm. He now will leave me" (3.451–52). Stephen even repeats the gesture in *Circe* during his violent encounter with the British private: "(he places his arm on Private Carr's sleeve)" (15.4472).

8. Similar scenes of walking and thinking or talking, associated with the peripatetic method of philosophy, appear in *Ulysses*, especially in "Proteus," "Calypso," "Lotus Eaters," "Hades," "Lycygonians," and "Wandering Rocks." In *Ithaca* "static" and "semistatic" are distinguished from "peripatetic intellectual dialogues" (l. 964–65). In "Scylla and Charybdis" Stephen associates "peripatetic" with the idea that God is a "noise in the street" and with Aristotle (l. 85–86). Aristotle taught while walking through the Lyceum, and his followers are often called the peripatetics.

9. Reinforcing his fallibility, Stephen misattributes the song by Fortunata to Aquinas (184n3).

10. See John Paul Riquelme.

11. Joyce lived in Trieste, Italy, from 1904 to 1915 and again briefly in 1920. There is no conclusive evidence that he read Lee (none of her books are listed in his Trieste library), but she was the only theorist Pater claimed as a disciple, and she knew Wilde and Virginia Woolf. It is unlikely that he was unaware of her work, even more improbable that he was not exposed to the theories of psychological aesthetics.

12. See Catherine Anne Wiley and Stefano Evangelista. While both essays consider the body, they focus on identity formation and gendered dynamics rather than kinesthetics.

13. The relationship between Lee and Anstruther-Thomson is discussed by Vineta Colby (155). Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's jointly authored essay "Beauty and Ugliness" (1897) was later included in Lee's book of the same title.

14. See Joe Briggs.

15. Wiley quotes Lewis and positions Lee in relation to modernism (58). Not all modernist responses were negative; Virginia Woolf cites "Vernon Lee's books on aesthetics" as evidence that women have begun to publish books in traditionally "masculine" fields (79).

16. Garrett Stewart summarizes these experiments but does not mention Lee's prescient contributions.

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17. Lee's "projection" anticipates postmodern formulations of "projective verse" associated with the Black Mountain Poets, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, and especially Charles Olson, whose essay "Projective Verse" deals with poetry's inscription of human motion.
18. David Seed discusses how Lee predicted reader-response criticism.
19. Lee would have applauded McWhorter's approach to reading Michel Foucault, as she focuses not on his philosophy or argumentation but on the various ways his texts affect the reader, or in McWhorter's terms, the "*undergoing*" of the text. McWhorter examines how the "works operate to transform various politically charged sites, not the least of which is the site of the act of reading itself, the politically complicated, multiply valenced site that is the reader" (xvii-xviii).
20. Stephen, in *A Portrait*, also emphasizes the importance of rhythm as "the first formal esthetic relation of part to part in any esthetic whole" (181).
21. Stewart differentiates oral and aural readings, the latter being silent but attentive to the sonic patterns of language in the phonotext.
22. Stewart describes the strain between the visible and audible depicted here as a universal "textual negotiation" and believes that for Joyce it provides a "deep structuring logic" (251).
23. Gifford (62) gives Hyde's translation: "And my love came behind me— / He came from the South; / His breast to my bosom, / His mouth to my mouth" (31).
24. Attridge counts the use of "lips" or "lipped" in "Sirens" (over 20) and suggests that the organ is an erotically charged synecdoche for the body that also frequently takes on the agentive subject position in the episode. The lips speak as if the body refuses the will or as if the subject is spoken by the body (*Peculiar* 160-66).
25. Writing of a similar transformation from "God's wounds" to "Zounds," which also recalls the word *sounds*, Stewart claims, "With the receptive epicenter of textual production thus hovering above the page, reading becomes a demystified but still palpable, still material, speech act—silent, reclusive, unmastered, but *placed*" (141). While Stewart "places" the role of readers in producing the phonotext, he views the body as a "sensorium" engaged in "evocalization" (2). I have attempted to suggest the many different movements of the body and mouth that may be associated with language. Human bodies possess different possibilities of perceiving, experiencing, or refusing to experience motion as they move with, against, and through texts.

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26. Numerous such rituals are invoked or performed in *Ulysses*, including the Catholic funeral ceremony ("Hades"), the Temperance Retreat ("Nausicaa"), Theosophical rituals ("Scylla and Charybdis"), Hebrew reading practices ("Aeolus" and "Circe"), etc.

27. The binding of language to bodies is parodically represented by sandwich-men moving through the novel bearing a letter of H. E. L. Y.'S ("Y lagging behind drew a chunk of bread from under his foreboard") (8.126–27).

28. A full exploration of kinesthetics in *Finnegans Wake* is beyond the scope of this essay. Although she does not provide an analysis of kinesthetic techniques, Carol Loeb Shloss argues that the modern dance training of Lucia Joyce influenced the form of the *Wake* and drew Joyce "into the worlds of mime, dance, and surrealism and into reconsidering the performative nature of language as well as the fictional aspects of everyday life" (7).

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Reviews

Bringing History to the Table

Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life, and the Turning World

by Bonnie Costello

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. 205 pages

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Bonnie Costello's newest book on American poetry, *Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life, and the Turning World*, is an ambitious journey into a place where lyric poetry, visual still life, and the politically turbulent world come together. Costello alternately figures this place as a table on which the objects of our lives sit; as a window between the interior and exterior; and as a foyer where we are concealed in a domestic setting and right on the cusp of some alien social world into which we might at any moment step. She presents four poets (Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, and Richard Wilbur) and one visual artist (Joseph Cornell) as particularly interested in this intersection of the private arts and public world, and she argues that each is profoundly preoccupied with how bringing the related media of lyric and still life together allows for an engagement with, and not an escape from, history. In articulating these claims she provides a new lens through which to read poems whose interpretations critics have previously considered to be settled and other poems that have received little critical attention.

Planets on Tables joins a number of recent books—including Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work*, Angus Fletcher's *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination*, and Susan Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*—that attempt to forge (or reforge) the relationship between poetry and that other world which is often assumed to be its opposite, that place we sometimes designate the social, the public, the historical, or the political. Costello's engaging introduction, which lays out the book's theoretical investments, apologizes at length for such an undertaking and thereby indicates just how loaded this project continues to be. When Theodor Adorno argued,

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now over half a century ago, in "Lyric Poetry and Society," an essay that lingers on the margins of this book but is never referred to directly, that "the generality of the lyric poem's content is, nevertheless, essentially social in nature" (57), and went on to theorize exactly how he imagined the social condition "impresses itself on the poetic form in a negative way" (58), he did not settle the matter but instead laid the groundwork for later critics to say this again and again, each in a slightly different way.

Costello's apology for such an undertaking is in no way indulgent, for she documents the ways in which, despite Adorno's efforts, both lyric and still life have long been considered the genres that attempt most pointedly to escape the world. In the face of this, Costello asks: "Might the exercise of the imagination upon dishes of peaches and plates of fish, the exercise of the unreal on the sensation of the real, have some relevance to the struggles that we record as history?" (x). Her answer is, resoundingly, yes, and she goes on to describe just how this works, arguing that these art forms are not opportunities to retreat from history but ways of thinking through it. In other words, lyric and still life evoke the larger world without having to be directly in or about it. Each of these artists responds to history by focusing on, reclaiming, and reconfiguring the intimate spaces of the individual by making the scope local and displaying the most intimate details. In doing so, they come to imagine the relationship between the public and private spheres as a dichotomy in a way that their predecessors (and, we later learn, their direct successors) did not. As Costello puts it:

Against the impersonal forces that had usurped the public realm and diminished the private realm, [these artists] sought to create tentative, partial spaces of order and beauty that might provide a conduit to the world without annihilating the person. (6)

This is a precarious position for any artist to inhabit, and Costello renders it in all its complexity in her accounts of particular artists.

Her study begins in the 1930s, with the turn away from modernism, and each of the five chapters focuses on the specific ways in which a particular artist brought history, as it were, to the table. She begins with the poet who is probably least associated with still life and the one who emerges as her greatest challenge: Wallace Stevens. Costello focuses mostly on the poems in *Parts of a World* in order to show how Stevens engaged with still life motifs, how he responded to paintings he knew or read

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about, and how he wrote what she calls “still life poems” (27). Stevens’s approach to the political events of the 1930s and 40s was not to document them but to let them “seep into” (27) his poems. There is a logic to this seeping, and Costello shows how Stevens employs a “reciprocal movement” between what she calls “a lighted room and a dark world” (27). This kind of movement throughout his still life poems allows the war, in particular, to enter into his poems without, as Costello argues, “reconstituting the gigantic which troubles him” (32). Costello lingers on a handful of poems—“A Dish of Peaches in Russia,” “The Glass of Water,” “Dry Loaf,” “Cuisine Bourgeoise,” and “Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers”—producing readings that show just how much violence exists in Stevens’s poems and proving that they are not the “retreat from the storm” (28) that we have considered them to be.

Because Costello’s chapters are most engaging when the poets give her the opportunity to describe things as concretely as possible, and because, in her formulation, Stevens is more about ideas and Williams is more about things, her next chapter proves to be more successful. If history “seeps into” Stevens’s poems, Williams deals with turbulent political times by presenting “a spatial compression of historical process” (49). Costello shows how this happens in poems that take up stationary objects in order to look long and hard, and in poems that resemble collages in that they “retain the memory of their tearing” (55). But what exactly Williams has in mind when he writes about history is complicated, and this chapter does justice to that by providing three nuanced formulations: history in a Williams poem can be understood as the past, approached as contemporaneous or present, or acknowledged as a dynamic that is always in process. But despite the particular way in which history enters a poem, it produces a scene of motion that we don’t normally associate with still life, and this is the real insight of the chapter. Reading poems that address the interplay of art and war from *The Wedge* as well as “Still Lives,” “Simplex Sigillum Veri,” “Sea Trout and Butterfish,” and several of Williams’s essays, Costello shows that even in a vase of flowers we find “the trace of struggles of great public and cultural import, modern as well as mythical” (52).

Because Elizabeth Bishop was, as Costello so perfectly phrases it, “a spirit without a home” (79), it seems strange, at first glance, that she would have produced—both in her poetry and in her ink drawings and water-color sketches—so many studies of stationary domestic objects. But like

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the Dutch paintings and the photographs of Walker Evans that Costello imagines influenced her, Bishop's "still life moments" (87) are not attempts to isolate objects from the world in which they were produced and owned. Instead, for Bishop, still life provided a way of understanding the people to whom these objects belonged, as well as "the cultural and psychological knowledge" (87) that they contained. In what feels like a major theoretical breakthrough, Costello shows how Bishop, in being interested in both the people behind the objects and the knowledge inside those objects, injects narrative into still life. Costello is juggling a tremendous amount in this chapter—she navigates reading Bishop's visual art, showing how "one can find the style and matter of her poetry" (84) in that art, and reinterpreting at length a number of poems from across Bishop's career, including "Jerónimo's House," "Filling Station," "The Bight," "12 O'clock News," "First Death in Nova Scotia," and "Going to the Bakery"—yet this revelation emerges seamlessly, and her conclusion that Bishop's still lifes signal disorder instead of order feels wholly organic. It may be Costello's own familiarity with the ins and outs of Bishop (she published *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* in 1991) or the fact that, by her own admission, Bishop was "less driven than either Stevens or Williams to isolate the object from its world and fix it in an aesthetic space" (86) that makes this chapter seem like the book's most compelling. Costello has more room to move here, and the materials we get to look at—watercolors, drafts, fragments, translations—feel richer and more diverse.

Costello's shift to the work of Joseph Cornell in the fourth chapter is both admirable and jarring. She neither apologizes for nor theorizes this shift but instead ties Cornell into her study by asserting that he created "physical poetry" (107), had a "profound interest in poetry" (108), and "seems to have identified more with the enterprise of poetry . . . than with the traditions of or contemporary movements in painting and sculpture" (108). Besides linking Cornell to the project of poetry in these ways, she also aligns his artistic endeavors with those of the poets she studies here: "Like the poets discussed in this book, Cornell kept up a lively dialectic of imagination and reality, and his boxes show involvement in the documentation of history as well as its transfiguration" (110). Yet despite these commonalities, in a book that is so much about language and about poetry's very nuanced appropriations of the realm of the visual arts, it seems odd to have a chapter that leaves language (if not form) behind and moves entirely into the visual. That said, the reader learns a

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number of things about Cornell that might not have surfaced in some other context—what exactly he saw at the 1939 New York World's Fair and the effect it had on him, the important role that New York's Horn and Hardart Automat played in his daily life and how it influenced his conception of space and crowds, his specific interest in World War II and the Korean War—and anyone interested in Cornell's art will find Costello's close readings of several of his boxes and collages (including *Soap Bubble Set*, *Black Hunter*, *Swiss Shoot the Chute*, *Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery*, *Medici Slot Machine*, and *Naples*) compelling.

Richard Wilbur, the self-proclaimed “poet of sensible objects” (157) who was greatly influenced by Marianne Moore, is the subject of Costello's last chapter, and in many ways he rounds out this book perfectly, since he explicitly mobilizes the public/private dialectic she has been dwelling on throughout. Cutting through the debate about whether Wilbur is preoccupied with private spaces or public spaces, Costello shows that his poetry does both at the same time: he creates order and pleasure in the local sphere yet always registers the presence of the public and the historical, especially in relation to his experiences of and emotions surrounding the events of World War II. He does this in a number of ways, sometimes by praising and celebrating local objects, sometimes by turning the local into the universal, and sometimes by theorizing the vexed issues of distance and remoteness. Costello reads a number of poems from across Wilbur's career—including “Potato,” “Melonègne,” “Terrace,” “The Beautiful Changes,” “Objects,” “Driftwood,” and “A Hole in the Floor”—that represent the complexity of his developing poetics but also exemplify, time and again, his use of his poems as ways of “counting his blessings and recalling himself into being” (157).

It's clear throughout that Costello has chosen neither her artists nor her time period at random. Early on she posits the historical trajectory on which her study depends: Cornell and these poets, she argues, are reacting to modernism's “collapse of distance, the violation and evacuation of the personal, the inhuman scale and power of the public realm” (18), which was, in turn, a reaction to “the nineteenth-century mode of sealed-off privacy” (16). In her conclusion she carries this reading of literary history forward. She argues that the late 1950s, where her study leaves off, see an “expansion of the private into the public” (169), which, in its embrace of bigger dimensions, results in a loss of attention to the local. But everything comes full circle in the contemporary poetry scene,

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which, particularly in the work of James Merrill, Charles Simic, Lucie Brock-Broido, and Robert Pinsky, ushers in a return to the dialectic that the book has been describing. This is not necessarily a standard account of the phases of American poetry—for instance, I found myself wondering exactly whose nineteenth-century “privacy” she is referring to (Longfellow’s? Whitman’s?)—and readers might find themselves skeptical. Yet even if one has doubts about the larger narrative, one cannot help but admire the powerful readings of the particular poems that Costello produces under its auspices.

In the end, Costello’s willingness to broach the vexed relationship between the lyric and history may in fact reify the very dichotomy she seeks to undermine. In asking what role lyric poetry and still life play in difficult political times and what their relationship to history is, she boldly asks us to interrogate our assumptions about how these arts work. But in undoing these notions of genre, she sometimes holds these categories more stable—as the “sensuous arts of the private, the everyday, the domestic” (viii), as “vehicles for the expression of private experience” (xiv)—than one might expect. Positioning the private and the public as opposites that are always in tension gives Costello a compelling subject for a study, but I found myself wondering what it would be like (and if it is even possible) to undo the very assumptions that the book rests on. Thus the central irony of the book: Costello wants us to reconsider the public/private dialectic, and she does this by showing that lyric poetry and still life are not divorced from history in the way we might have thought they are. But in order to take down this dichotomy between public and private she must first set it up, a procedure that may actually, at moments, work to reinforce it. When, for example, she writes, “Poetry, made in the private realm, is nevertheless a kind of action and interaction in society” (xiv), she is placing emphasis on the second part of the sentence. But her book may have benefited from a more sustained challenge to the first. Is lyric, in fact, a product of the private realm, or does the very process of its creation engage history in ways that go beyond subsequent critical excavations of history as content?

Critics, teachers, and readers interested in how lyric poetry and still life might be related will find a wealth of different formulations in this book. This is both its strongest and most distracting feature. Sometimes Costello treats poetry and still life as distinct art forms, for instance in accounts of poetry as faced with and reacting to visual art; at other times

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she describes still life as what occurs inside poems, in moments that she refers to as poems' "still life gestures" (18) or "still life arrangements" (14); and at other times the two forms are so inextricable that she can refer, for example, to Stevens's "still life poems" (27). This seems largely to be an inside/outside problem: is still life something that occurs, appears, or is rendered inside lyric poems, or do poems respond to the separate category of still life art that is exterior to it? Costello doesn't settle this question, and while that can produce the frustrating sensation of not knowing precisely how she situates the two media in relation to each other in any given instance, it also keeps her readings fresh and nonreductive. Each of these artists conceives of and addresses the relationship differently, and Costello takes her cues from them.

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Sense and Censorship

The Artistic Censoring of Sexuality: Fantasy and Judgment in the Twentieth-Century Novel

by Susan Mooney

Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008. 321 pages

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One of the principal objectives of the modern novelist has been to represent sexual experience with both physical explicitness and psychological accuracy, and one of the novelist's principal resources in achieving this objective has been psychoanalysis, the seminal tenets of which coincide with the formal and thematic innovations of literary modernism. Indeed, the Freudian subject in many ways became the psychological subject of the modern novel, as prominent novelists increasingly incorporated Freud's theories of repression and fantasy into their narratives, especially in their attempts to capture the degree to which sexual urges and anxieties informed the interior consciousness of their characters and saturated those characters' everyday lives. In the field of literary criticism, meanwhile, Freud's theory of dreamwork provided multiple generations of scholars with a tempting methodology for reading these novels symptomatically, either as the product of the author's own fantasies or as a heightened reflection of the wider culture's psychosexual anxieties. Viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, modernist literature could function therapeutically, as a kind of collective talking cure for a culture stifled by excessive repression.

The modern novel thus engaged the phenomena of censorship on at least two levels: one, the explicit treatment of sexuality frequently provoked the intervention of the state, which resulted in some famous obscenity trials; two, displacement and condensation became literary techniques for the realistic representation of sexual themes, making censorship itself a trope in modern narrative. Increasingly over the course of the twentieth century, these two modes of censorship—by the state and by the author himself or herself—came to operate in a curious and complicated tandem: novelists began to incorporate the obscenity trial both thematically and formally in their narratives, and at the same time

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Freudian theory became a key method for understanding the state's investment in literary censorship.

Susan Mooney's *The Artistic Censoring of Sexuality* engages this thorny intersection of the state's attempt to suppress obscenity in modern literature and the deployment of psychoanalytic modes of censorship in the same literature. In order to negotiate between these modes of censorship, Mooney coins the term *censoring* to describe the ways modern novelists incorporated their struggle with the state into their literary themes and techniques. As she specifies, censoring "particularly connotes the activity and artistic production of censorship in a literary text" (2). Her introduction, "The Sense of Censoring," elaborates on her title's terminology, affirming that "the law's interest in regulating sexuality is what often becomes reenacted and reinterpreted in literary fiction involving sexual portrayal" (15). Ultimately, Mooney is concerned with the ethical implications of this portrayal, claiming that "our need to censor implies that there is a good that can be achieved" (16). What exactly this good is, and what methods we might use to determine or achieve it, are not always clear in her highly interesting study.

Mooney focuses on four novels from considerably different cultural traditions and historical moments—James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1958), Luis Martín-Santos's *Time of Silence* (1961), and Victor Erofeev's *Russian Beauty* (1990)—which allows her to engage a wider comparative scope than studies of literary censorship that have tended to focus on Anglo American literature. More specifically, this choice of texts gives her an opportunity to compare the "flexible legality" (6) of censorship practices in liberal democracies, which usually involve a postpublication judicial proceeding in which the author or publisher enjoys at least a theoretical presumption of innocence, with the more restrictive dictatorial regimes of Francoist Spain and Soviet Russia, in which prepublication censorship was normal and authors with a modernist bent were generally regarded as dangerous. But while Mooney's first chapter, "Censorship: Political and Theoretical Structures," frames this important contrast, it also reveals how her methodological investments tend to obscure and confuse her critical objectives. Specifically, it shows how her deployment of psychoanalytic theories of censorship and fantasy doesn't always provide an adequate comparative frame for a full appreciation of the different historical and cultural contexts of the texts she studies. She opens this chapter, for instance, by citing Slavoj Žižek's seminal Lacanian

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contention that “there is no sexual relationship. This absence is at the core of fantasy” (23). With this universalist theory as her opening gambit, it is not surprising that she quickly concludes that “the premises of censorship are rather similar across these societies, and some of the censoring practices and their impact do not suggest enormous differences in theory” (24). Mooney’s first two chapters, then, reveal an important liability to her method: the constitutive and unconscious nature of censorship in her deployment of psychoanalytic theory doesn’t always enable her to explore fully the specific and conscious practices of censorship in concrete historical and political contexts.

Indeed, Mooney is more concerned with the productivity of “censoring” in her chosen texts than she is with their actual history of legal censorship. Thus the bulk of her study consists of four relatively free-standing chapters featuring close readings of each of the four novels. These chapters are in turn broken down into numerous relatively short sections, a structure that tends to privilege local insight over synthetic argument. Nevertheless, Mooney’s accretive insights indicate a number of shared thematic concerns across these novels, and her insistence that these concerns implicate the reader in the process of ethical judgment is provocative, even if her own ethical conclusions frequently feel both mundane and muddled.

If there is an anchoring section in Mooney’s book, it is not the preface, the introduction, or the opening theoretical discussion, but rather the analysis of the “Circe” episode in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the focus of her second chapter. *Ulysses* was the object of the most famous and influential obscenity trial in modern literary history, and Joyce’s formal innovations and aesthetic philosophy provided a precedent that deeply informs the objectives of the other three novels in Mooney’s corpus. Specifically, Joyce’s novel, and particularly the “Circe” episode, affirmed that male masochism would be one of the principal thematic obsessions whose theorization modern literature would crib from Freud. Borrowing liberally from Gilles Deleuze, Kaja Silverman, and the always-at-hand Slavoj Žižek, Mooney foregrounds the way “Bloom’s and Stephen’s liminal experiences in Nighttown center on the doing and undoing of masculinity in its various forms” (73). Mooney focuses exclusively on “Circe” not only because it structurally “draws on a metatextual mindlike consciousness of the whole narrative that is *Ulysses*” (61) but also because, as a “theater of judgment,” it foregrounds the ethical concerns that form her recurrent focus. Not

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surprisingly, this orientation enables a fairly conventional redemptive reading of the episode, in which the final apparition of Bloom's dead son Rudy indicates that "the Law of the fathers (language, religion, military and political codes, social laws, written or tacit) is subdued and brought into a momentary harmony by a poetics of filial love and identity" (106). This parenthetical parataxis provides one of many examples of a central liability of Mooney's method. Put simply, such a list tends to reduce the discrete operations of these diverse categories of regulation into serial instances of a rote psychoanalytic formula whose ethical traction gets vitiated by its extensive deployment.

The problems with Mooney's ethical agenda become further evident in her discussion of *Lolita*, a novel that presents a more acute challenge for readers concerned with moral redemption or judgment. Mooney opens her chapter with the assertion that "Nabokov, with *Lolita*, presents us with this highly flawed character-narrator in order to submit him to judgment, a judgment that has been prepared in the narrative ethically and aesthetically" (115). With this formulation she effectively projects her own moral framework onto a text that makes considerable effort to avoid one. Thus she interprets Humbert's ironic deployment of confessional tropes as evidence of "his attempt to censor or block out our ethical apprehension of the abused child Dolores and tempt us to read her as an exotic, desiring, and desired other" (139). She then in essence extracts from the text "the abused child Dolores" about whom she can make such dubious claims as "her discourses offer alternative happy narratives for the child subject, casual comic-book language that excludes the adult from the child's realm, and lessons in conflict with evil" (151). This methodologically dubious projection allows Mooney to conclude confidently:

Nabokov's novel appeals to readers to activate our powers of judgment, to transcend the focalization of the rogue character-narrator Humbert, and to gain a critical view of the censoring patterns enacted in his narrative that seek to cover up . . . the other as the abused child Dolores. (160)

Mooney seems to have decided to read John Ray's foreword at face value and to ignore Nabokov's own insistence that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow" (314). Admirable as this reading may be on an ethical level, it can only be achieved by eliding both the aesthetic philosophy and the moral

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ambiguity that have made this novel so appealing to, and problematic for, generations of critics.

In the context of Franco's Spain, conveniently contemporaneous with Nabokov's America, the relationship between masculinity, aesthetics, and ethics had both more clarity and more urgency, and Mooney's chapter on Luis Martin-Santos's *Tiempo de Silencio* benefits accordingly. In *Tiempo de Silencio*, the deployment of Joycean formal innovations toward psychoanalytically intelligible ethical ends is explicit (Martin-Santos was a trained psychiatrist whose single novel was intended as a moral indictment of Franco's Spain), and thus Mooney's readings have more traction. In particular, her analysis of how the medicoscientific topics of vivisection and cancer act as props for the protagonist and narrator Pedro's masochistic fantasies is highly rewarding and insightful. Nevertheless, these insights struggle against Mooney's persistent habit of paratactic enumeration. Here is one example of many:

These fantasy transformations involving science express a sense of censoring because Pedro's conception of science is largely based on fear, coldness, objectivity, lack of caring, cutting away, operating, conducting autopsies. (189)

Such sentences tend to scatter Mooney's focus, with the result that the reader must struggle to extract her argument from proliferating lists of loosely linked categories.

The last novel Mooney examines, Viktor Erofeev's *Russian Beauty*, represents, like *Tiempo de Silencio*, a sustained narrative critique of the sociosexual mores of an oppressive regime in the twilight of its political dominance. However, as a glasnost-era text with a female narrator, Erofeev's wildly experimental novel brings Mooney firmly into the epoch of postmodernity while also referring recurrently back to the famous female protagonists of pre-Soviet Russian Realism. As Mooney claims, in the sexually explicit and formally experimental narration of its protagonist Irina, *Russian Beauty* "exposes the earlier century's poetic idealization of woman for postmodern reconsideration" (227). Here again, as with the previous chapters, Mooney's analysis somewhat maddeningly combines brilliance and banality. She effectively reveals how "Irina's writing and actions script her as a postmodern Russian Joan of Arc whose beautiful sex or sexual beauty is censored in a series of episodes in which the character

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is rejected, silenced, or denied" (240). But then, placing this protofeminist deconstruction of modernist masculine fantasy over and against the canonical examples she's previously discussed, Mooney can only conclude, "The man's and woman's approaches to the pornographic self complement each other in that they are demonstrations of the will to judgment. That judgment promises to supply meaning and love" (262). Like her peculiar projection of Dolores Haze, this emphasis on complementarity over contradiction achieves an ethical objective, but only at the expense of analytical insight.

But as Mooney concedes in her concluding "Comparative Reflections," "None of these novels present love as a successful, life-affirming element" (273). In this final chapter—which, like the study that precedes it, is both scattered and provocative—she clarifies that "in framing sexuality in dramatic, ironic, and nondidactic ways, [these authors] leave much of the judgmental activity to an implied reader" (276). Part of Mooney's problem is that she has no consistent method for relating these frames to their concrete historical and cultural contexts. Thus she reminds us that "*Ulysses* is a novel about 1904 colonial Ireland, *Lolita* about postwar America, *Tiempo de silencio* about Francoist Spain, and *Russkaia krasavitsa* about Soviet Russia," only to immediately assert that "the differences between the novels' settings in liberal democracies and repressive regimes are not stark" (272). What Mooney lacks, in other words, is a sociohistorical method that might situate these novels in the concrete circuits of communication that make both their similarities and their differences meaningful. As a result, she can only give us a selection of psychoanalytic meditations whose considerable complexity conflicts with her simple moral judgments.

Indeed, in the end Mooney's psychoanalytic interpretations seem irreconcilable with her more humanistic take on the activity of judgment. Each of her chapters restlessly surveys the complex and frequently contradictory ways in which one of her authors struggles with the constraints imposed on the expression of sexuality, both in the shared generic protocols of the novel and in the more specific context of a particular historical and national location. And she does indeed prove that these authors "share an investment in critical explorations of sexuality, and through these, the artistic censoring of sexuality" (268). But her overinvestment in the terms of her title both impedes and deflects much of her analysis, leading her,

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on the one hand, to force a wide variety of literary, psychological, and sociological phenomena into one vague category and, on the other hand, to leverage the ethical mandate implied by that category into a series of judgments that tend to obscure the contradictions inherent in these strikingly different novels.

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Desire, Agency, and Black American Subjectivity

Once You Go Black:

Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual

by Robert Reid-Pharr

New York: New York University Press, 2007. 208 pages

John C. Charles

Robert Reid-Pharr's *Once You Go Black* investigates what might seem to be a self-evident claim: that "the Black American has not only had a great hand in the creation of America and thus the world but also and importantly that the Black American, quiet as it's kept, has had a substantial role in the creation of himself" (2). Reid-Pharr asks readers to "take seriously the idea that we all possess agency and indeed choice" (3). Legions of other writers have already taken up the issue of black agency, but Reid-Pharr's concern is with the narrowness of their focus in illustrating the scope and nature of that agency. For all our conceptual advances in thinking critically about race, he argues, contemporary notions of Black American identity formation are still radically determined by a Hegelian narrative in which "the master strikes the slave, the slave strikes back, and thus a man is created" (4). The representative instance of this dynamic of course is Frederick Douglass's now-mythic thrashing of the slave breaker Edward Covey, an act in which he resurrects himself, and implicitly the race, from what he calls the "tomb" of slavery.

The problem is that, ideologically speaking, Douglass's choice has become *the* choice, precluding a range of other possibilities. The perpetual replaying of this scene or, more precisely, the structure of thought embedded in this scene (that whiteness and blackness are mutually defined through perpetual, antagonistic struggle) renders blackness "perhaps the most tradition-bound product that [this] country manufactures" (3). Reid-Pharr casts a skeptical eye on the seemingly innocuous concept of tradition—as well as home, innocence, and community. These notions may help produce a redemptive and counterhegemonic version of blackness, but they also function as sites of discipline. Reid-Pharr believes that contemporary thinkers would do well to recall the existentialist maxim that "experience precedes essence" when thinking of Black American

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identity, history, and culture, and to confront the fact that African Americans have always “chosen” their blackness, whether they know it or not. Black identity and culture are not simply thrust whole-cloth onto a passive “African” mass by an all-powerful white culture. Nor is it mystically transmitted from ancient African beginnings. Instead, Black American individuals have always on some level chosen, or at least negotiated, the nature of their affiliation with the communal—the race and the nation—and in this choosing they make and remake the communal.

Once You Go Black explores its thesis by turning to the late novels of three midcentury giants: Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. Each of these thinkers challenges the coercive effect of tradition on Black individuality. Moreover, they refuse the idea of Black American innocence and victimhood, asserting instead that as modern subjects African Americans must claim responsibility for their role in the creation of their identities and America itself, for good and ill. The late work of these writers demonstrates that “black subjectivity is a radically undecided concept . . . [and that] blackness marks a site of becoming rather than a locus of fixed tradition” (122). This relatively fluid conception of blackness arises, according to Reid-Pharr, as a result of the social, political, economic, and technological transformations that took place in the three decades following the Second World War, transformations that fundamentally challenged the materiality of blackness.

In response, many Black radical intellectuals of the following generation attempted to restore a discrete and stable notion of blackness. Black nationalist intellectuals, despite their being “quintessential moderns, master technicians of spectacle and media” (135–36), deployed a highly conservative rhetoric of tradition that anchored Black American identity in the struggle between white master and black slave, and before that to an ancient, yet transhistorical, essential African body. This reliance on an unchanging African corporeality safeguarded an idea of Black American innocence and coherence. Reid-Pharr focuses on the work and thought of Black Panther Huey Newton and filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles, particularly their use of a racist visual vocabulary when embedding Black American identity within a hypermasculine and rebellious black body. Reid-Pharr argues that what they gain in oppositional certainty they lose in the black subject’s individuality and complexity.

Once You Go Black is less concerned with white supremacist thought than with the Black traditionalists’ shared commitment to the idea of

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absolute black difference. Reid-Pharr challenges the social conservatism and essentialism of Black nationalists as well as the contradictory pessimism of Black liberals and leftists. Black nationalists claim that Black American identity emanates from a pure, ancient, and unchanging African origin. Black liberals and leftists repeatedly assert that race is a socially constructed fiction, but then trump the liberatory possibilities of this insight by invoking the ubiquitous Althusserian (and literal) policeman, a ceaselessly hailing figure who essentially reinstates “a metaphysics of difference in which Black Americans are refigured as animated objects, noble victims, the vaguely discernible subaltern, the never fully articulate other” (148). Reid-Pharr insists on “intellectual and ethical obstinacy” if we are ever to move beyond this impasse.

The notion that blackness is grounded primarily on an idea of the black subject locked in perpetual combat with the white master turned policeman is not only limiting, it is also contradicted by both the historical record and by “all those almond-shaped eyes and all that sand-colored skin” in the American populace (4). Thus African Americans have not only done battle with whites, but more frequently

cajoled, bargained, shuffled, run, used our cunning and intellect to effect if not positive then hopefully less than deadly ends. . . . [O]ne might easily make the provocative claim that the Black American has utilized sex and sexuality as a means by which to ensure the survival of black individuals and communities to a much greater extent [than he or she has used violence]. (4)

Reid-Pharr's foregrounding of questions of individual choice and desire is what sets his work apart from numerous other critiques of traditional conceptions of blackness, and especially Black nationalism. He explores how ideology shapes but in no way contains desire, and particularly how erotic desire shapes racial desire—among other things, desire for racial purity and self-mastery. Moreover, he returns repeatedly to the fact that the foundational battle between master and slave, Covey and Douglass, “policeman” and “nigger,” to use his phrasing (149), is a struggle between *men*, often infused with an unacknowledged homoeroticism. Ideological formations such as white supremacy and black nationalism attempt to discipline unruly desire, but desire invariably goes where it will and wreaks havoc on tidy political rhetoric. The erotic, he reminds us, is a means to reposition oneself in society, and he contends that attention to

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the erotic will allow us to better appreciate the spaces, however small, in which individual choice, communal affiliation, and self-creation become possible.

In his first chapter, "The Funny Father's Luck," Reid-Pharr argues that Richard Wright was a dissembler (41) who publicly perpetuated narratives of his own ideological origins that rendered him a permanently Southern and innocent black child, despite the ample evidence provided by his work, which moved well beyond restaging traditional, Southern, folk-based notions of blackness. He does this to maintain his "civility" (45–46), his capacity to speak as the "Father of modern Black American literature" (49), and to sustain an audience that wants him to occupy this position. When seen in light of much of his later work, however, Wright seems "funny" (39): a black writer in decline presumably because he has strayed from his roots. Reid-Pharr wants to defend this funniness, arguing that Wright's greatest gift is the intellectual "promiscuity" that he bequeaths his "varied and multihued progeny" (52). Reid-Pharr puts into tension Wright's status as Father of Black American Literature (a status of celebrity) with his status as an intellectual—the former required him to remain an innocent Southern black boy, and the latter required him to explore his own individual desires, which quite regularly deviated from commonly understood notions of communal desire.

Reid-Pharr parallels the funniness of the Black intellectual with the putative queerness of blackness in general. Located by mainstream social science outside the norms of white heteropatriarchy, blackness has connoted gender and sexual deviance. Slavery repressed the black father and allegedly produced an excessively present and powerful black mother, who in turn produced deviant, queer black children.¹ Reid-Pharr explores how these issues manifest in Wright's "funny" last novel, *The Long Dream* (1958), in which the protagonist Rex "Fish" Tucker struggles to accept the compromised and deviant manhood connoted by his name. He is able to come to terms with his "queer" name, so to speak, by expatriating, as Wright did, to a new home overseas.

Funniness gives way to phoniness in the following chapter, "Ralph Ellison's Blues." Reid-Pharr continues to examine the complications attendant upon black intellectuals founding a public persona on a seamless identification with black folk culture, and the idea that the "Black American intellectual had necessarily to reproduce the vernacular even in his most abstract works if these works were to have true purpose" (70).

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Even though Ellison cites folk culture as the source of his own humanist ethical commitments, Reid-Pharr asserts that Ellison knew this was a trap and ended up spending the last several decades of his life penning a novel that radically disputed these precepts. This, he believes, is the real reason why Ellison was unable to finish *Juneteenth* during his lifetime.

The novel revolves around Daddy Hickman, a blues man who ends up with a baby delivered into his hands by a white woman who, in a perverse form of penance, offers her child as a substitute for Hickman's brother, who was lynched due to her false rape accusation. He accepts the "white" baby of unknown fathering and then raises him as black. Hickman leaves behind his life as a rambling musician for a life as an evangelical preacher, and he commits Bliss to this life as well, against his will. Although it remains unacknowledged, Hickman repeatedly punishes Bliss for the circumstances of his birth by forcing him to participate each week in an elaborate ritual of death and rebirth, where Bliss emerges from a closed coffin in front of stunned congregations, symbolizing the community's spiritual and racial rebirth. Bliss is loved by Hickman and the community, but as the coffin suggests, the community and its traditions also suffocate his individuality, turning him into what Reid-Pharr calls a "monster" (82)—a figure unable to love. Reid-Pharr argues that Bliss detects the phoniness of this ritual and the traditions themselves, and thus when he is old enough to choose his communal affiliation, he not only chooses whiteness, he transforms himself first into a moviemaker, a peddler of the artificial, before becoming a race-baiting Southern senator, reviling the very people and culture from which he sprang. Here Ellison critiques the American preference for false historical narratives of racial purity over the messier but more accurate knowledge that history "happened body to body, belly to belly over the long years." (*Juneteenth* 162; qtd. in Reid-Pharr 82). In *Juneteenth*, Reid-Pharr believes that Ellison confronts the fact that "there is no blues literature per se" and that folk traditions "can no longer be recognized by any rigorous intellectual as either the exclusive property of the Black American or even as emanating exclusively from the folk" (94).

In chapter 3, "Alas Poor Jimmy," Reid-Pharr argues that James Baldwin's last novel, *Just Above My Head* (1979), specifically narrates the failure of the "old intimacies": "the intimacy of church, of the racial community, sexual intimacy, familial intimacy, the presumed intimacy shared between the politically committed intellectual and the people whom he serves"

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(101). These sustaining communal connections are no longer—nor have they ever been—certain. Reid-Pharr reminds us that although the black individual's intimate relation to the community, to the folk, may seem inevitable, real "intimacy" with the community is impossible if the individual cannot choose but is instead merely a "more or less standard emanation of a nebulous, undifferentiated black community" (101). Without the ability to reject the beloved (community), there is no real option to embrace it either.

Reid-Pharr concentrates his reading on Arthur Montana, a queer black gospel singer, and the process he goes through before he fully embraces his "song" (112), his place within this cultural tradition and within the community. He argues that gospel, like other cultural forms, if they are to be more than "empty forms"—if they are to be sustaining and empowering—must be integrated with the individual performer's idiosyncratic needs, desires, and styles (107). Reliance on the individual, a particular body with particular desires, necessarily alienates that individual from an abstract communal ideal. This, however, is a productive alienation, insofar as it creates the space for subjectivity and agency. Through Montana, Baldwin introduces homosexuality into sacred black traditions and thereby clarifies that "we are continually in a process of choosing whether and how to continue those traditions" (108). Baldwin wants the reader to appreciate that Arthur's embrace of tradition was precisely not inevitable, and that his decision recreates and revitalizes both the tradition and the community of which it is an expression.

In chapter 4, "Saint Huey," Reid-Pharr examines the carefully managed public image of Huey Newton, the Black Panthers' Minister of Defense, in conjunction with a selection of poems by Nikki Giovanni. In both cases Reid-Pharr wants to elucidate how these figures utilized sexual desire in their expressions of racial desire. Black nationalists drew on the idea of the "clothed African savage"—an idea remarkably similar to that utilized by white American racists—in part because it

allowed for the articulation of a Black American identity that was seductive and sexy because it was *in* yet not *of* modern American society. And in this way it provided a seemingly solid basis on which one might produce a literature and culture of both combat and cultural renewal. (129)

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In the post-World War II moment, Black American identity is increasingly circulated and “consumed” throughout the world. For this reason it will inevitably fail to reproduce the same static qualities in all times and places and will thus (unavoidably) change into something else—something potentially not “Black.” Black nationalism invokes the idea of an ancient African body that is seductive because it is innocent, rebellious, and implicitly outside the domesticating, emasculating effects of (white) civilization. For Reid-Pharr, Black nationalism’s attempts to seduce are attempts to discipline black desire, and in the process stabilize and restrict that which is inexorably mutable. It turns out that Huey Newton ultimately aspired to connect to a “transracial, internationalist, anticapitalist movement” and was hoping to renounce his status as radical black saint (141). Moreover, Newton was widely known to have addressed issues of sexual liberation and gay rights, which Reid Pharr reads as “evidence of [Newton’s] will to break the hold that the logic of black historical and cultural profundity holds within the American imagination” (144). The example of Black nationalism and Huey Newton in particular underscores for Reid-Pharr the necessity of abandoning the idea of innocent communities and innocent leaders.

The final chapter, “Queer Sweetback,” investigates how filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles attempts to counter the “erosion of black innocence” in his landmark blaxploitation film *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (1971). For Reid-Pharr, Van Peebles accomplishes in this film

the rearticulation of a grammar of Black American realism (ghetto violence, grinding poverty, confrontations with police and state, and most especially a certain potent and almost inexhaustible black sexuality) that continues today as a primary discursive mode (with perhaps even more vigor) in the efforts of a host of hip-hop artists. (153)

The bulk of the narrative centers on the flight of the protagonist Sweetback, a sex worker in a brothel, from the police. Sweetback is falsely accused (that is, innocent), and thus the viewer is reminded that in contemporary American culture we have not advanced “beyond the world of meaning and affect produced during our centuries-long sojourn in and with slavery” (158)—white and black, guilty and innocent, in combat now and forever. Van Peebles ends up undermining Sweetback’s heroic victimhood, however. He makes his protagonist essentially mute, gives him only

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six lines in the film, and limits his action almost exclusively to running, fighting, and “fucking”—the latter term constituting one of his six lines. Sweetback is thus all body and, for Reid-Pharr, devoid of subjectivity. Moreover, Van Peebles’s tethering of black innocence to potent black sexuality unintentionally interferes with the operation of a neat racial and moral economy. In more than one scene Sweetback’s hypersexuality raises the specter of interracial sex and cooperation—for example, while on the lam, Sweetback has sex with a white female motorcycle gang leader, and this woman later helps him escape the police. Somewhat paradoxically, Van Peebles attempts to mask this interracialism by repeatedly “rehash[ing] the image of the spectacular [black] homosexual,” a red herring that attempts to eclipse the interracial eroticism that is manifest in the film (166). For Reid-Pharr, the homosexual is necessary to distract from Van Peebles’s violation of the communal racial purity that he is attempting to produce.

Once You Go Black is provocative and suggestive, but it is also hamstrung by a number of insufficiently supported claims, ones that seem crucial to Reid-Pharr’s overall argument. He concludes by refusing “to privilege the rhetorics of return and nostalgia that so burden much contemporary criticism of Black American literature and culture,” nostalgia “for an ever-beckoning Africa” (172). Although he does provide somewhat sparing evidence of this tendency among Black nationalists of the 1960s and 70s, the thrust of his critique is that these attitudes and beliefs did not cease 40 years ago but in fact continue to structure our thinking today. “The game for the contemporary intellectual” he says, “is always played in the present” (7). What’s missing, however, is exactly whom Reid-Pharr is playing against in the present. Who, specifically, are his contemporary interlocutors? Who are the representative critics invested in “profound black tradition”? Who are the thinkers predicating their thought on hyperreal yet hyperabstract black bodies? He mentions that Van Peebles’s *Sweet Sweetback* produced a set of visual tropes still used today by hip hop artists. Are hip hop culture and its critics a key concern and motivation for writing this work? If so, in what way is this germane to his overall argument? I should say that in general I agree with these claims, but his argument would have considerably more critical purchase for reframing contemporary thought on “Black American literature and culture,” specifically for the advancement of a Queer Black Studies, if he had provided illuminating and representative examples of this tendency.

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Missing are useful recent examples of the problem that he is trying to address.

Reid-Pharr also makes numerous references to the historical specificity of his project, to his assertion that the dramatic transformations taking place at all levels of society, from the social to the technological, directly transformed the limits of blackness. This reader is left, however, with a desire for a much more nuanced account of the period under discussion and in particular for a significantly more concrete elaboration of the causal relationship between these changes and the Black American's increased opportunity for choice and agency. One could argue, for example, that the changes brought about by increased African American migration to urban centers in some ways actually increased the materiality of blackness in specific contexts. Many black radicals established themselves in urban centers, and their more stable notion of blackness may have emerged in part from witnessing the interlocking phenomena of European "ethnics" moving out of cities into whites-only suburbs, and thus into whiteness, while African Americans were left behind in burgeoning all-black ghettos, their racial difference reinforced by these geographic restrictions. Moreover, while Reid-Pharr argues that developing technologies of travel, communication, and culture made blackness more abstract, these very same forces also dramatically enhanced African American diasporic consciousness. In other words, these technologies, not just ideology, facilitated an unprecedented sense of connectedness to Africa for Black Americans.

These reservations notwithstanding, *Once You Go Black* is a compelling study, providing its readers with a productive model for challenging the racial common sense that still permeates discussions of African American literature and culture. Reid-Pharr asks difficult, potentially discomfiting questions, ones without prescribed answers, that help us to rethink the underlying assumptions of cultural and political value that structure received narratives of blackness. His focus on choice, desire, and seduction in particular highlights the limits of pride-based rhetoric and brings to light a range of putatively illegitimate stories that allow readers access to formerly disavowed histories and strategies for survival. This study should also be of interest to Americanist scholars of racial and ethnic minority literatures more generally, or for anyone attempting to think through the contradictions inherent in most contemporary articulations of identity politics.

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Note

1. For a strong discussion of this phenomenon, see Ferguson.

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Seeking Christian Humanism

The Return of Christian Humanism:

Chesterton, Eliot, Tolkien, and the Romance of History

by Lee Oser

Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. 190 pages

George S. Lensing

Lee Oser's *The Return of Christian Humanism* is not about a new emergence of contemporary Christian humanists but about three earlier figures whom Oser sees as offering a map for such a return. In his judgment, a revived Christian humanism is urgently needed to bridge secularism and theocracy in modern American society, but the prospects are dim. He finds the academy infected with a hostile anti-Christian and atheistic bias. Forms of modernism and postmodernism have opened deep intellectual chasms; they have "pushed Christian humanism effectively out of the academy" and installed a catalogue of "cults" that have "separated literary studies from the tradition and closed off the avenues to renewal" (85).

Of Oser's three models, Chesterton, Eliot, and Tolkien, he seems almost obsessed with Eliot, with whom he engages in a kind of love-hate dialogue throughout the whole book. Eliot's name and example appear in every chapter and on almost every page. What I find most interesting in the book is the struggle—and it clearly is a struggle—on the part of the author to "place" Eliot in the tradition of Christian humanism.

Chesterton is of course the great spokesman for Christian orthodoxy and the tradition that nourishes it. He is hardly a major literary figure, though Oser makes a not completely convincing case for the novel *The Flying Inn* ("no novel written in the last century is more prescient" [156]). Chesterton matters to Oser's discussion because of his repudiation of aestheticism (art that looks solely inward and to itself), his allegiance to the democracy of God's created children, and his conversion to the rootedness and longevity of Catholicism—all converging in his jocular and witty but no less defiant resistance to his secular foes (Pater, Nietzsche, Wilde, Shaw, Kipling, Wells, Tolstoy). In his essay "Is Humanism a Religion?" he writes: "I distrust spiritual experiments outside the central spiritual tradition; for the simple reason that I think they do not last, even if they manage to

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spread" (155). Oser sees the writings of Chesterton as deriving from the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, especially his espousal of what Oser calls "virginal reason, if you will" (34), a purer reason that is open to science and all other forms of human learning.

Tolkien is the most unlikely of Oser's models, even though, of the three, he is the most widely read by a general audience in this century. Especially in the books that make up *The Lord of the Rings*, his fantasy fiction lends itself easily to Christian allegorical interpretation, and Tolkien first satisfies a pleasure of which modernist writers like Joyce and Woolf deprive us (in Oser's view): they "seldom move the body to strong emotion" (55). Creating his own tradition in myth, Tolkien achieves in his fiction the very thing that Tolkien admired about Shakespeare (and that Oser recommends in him): "So great is the bounty with which he [Shakespeare] has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" (Tolkien 180; qtd. by Oser 59). In Oser's view, Tolkien's mythmaking overpowers Eliot's (and Joyce's) attempts at the "mythical method" which, he believes, "was expressly directed against narrative" (65).

I am sure that Oser is aware that much of what he puts forth here and throughout the book is provocative and subject to dispute. I also suspect that in his classrooms at the College of Holy Cross he delights in rousing his students to lively debate and engaging controversy. That is very much the tone to which this book is pitched. I am resisting the temptation to rise to the bait except in some of his charges against Eliot, the Christian humanist who most fascinates and exasperates him. Oser's "dialogue" with Eliot is especially interesting to me because, almost a half-century after Eliot's death, here is evidence that this dominant architect of modernism continues to perplex and confound us, as if we, like Oser, are still trying to figure out just what to do with him. It is surely clear by now that those who tried a few years ago to dismiss him as a misogynist, anti-Semite, and elitist have not succeeded in shunting him aside.

I would have thought that Oser's Eliot would center on *Four Quartets*, a poem that he notes in passing "may be the finest long poem in English in the twentieth century" (88). Suprisingly, he has little to say about this poem, or any of the poems written after Eliot's conversion. In fact, he sometimes refers to "Eliot" as if he were a fixed and final monolith, and his whole career—pre- and post-Christian—were uniformly one. Oser's

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Eliot, however, is the poet of "Gerontion" and *The Waste Land*, the poet who not only embraced modernism but helped to invent it and thus introduced the very strains on the tradition of Christian humanism that Oser deplores.

If Chesterton is the heir of Aquinas, Eliot unfortunately embraces Augustine. Both of the latter are preoccupied with original sin and consequently a distrust of the fully human. "For Augustine and Eliot," writes Oser, "skepticism about human powers reinforces a tendency towards asceticism, isolating the soul on its journey—toward God or the Void" (41). But in poems like *The Waste Land*, *Ash Wednesday*, and *Four Quartets*, asceticism for Eliot, as it was for Buddha, is not an isolating end in itself but a means toward union with God and an escape from the Void. "Who then devised the torment? Love. / Love is the unfamiliar Name," the poet says in "Little Gidding." Purgation is the route to beatitude, and asceticism embraces another and unignorable part of orthodoxy that seems of little interest to Oser: the Christian mystical tradition.

If Chesterton is "comical, democratic, and orthodox," Eliot, contrariwise, is "ironic, aristocratic, and a priest of art" (39). I suppose that by "a priest of art," Oser means that he encamps with the aesthetes in a Pateresque art-for-art's-sake predilection. "Eliot the moralist and Eliot the artist could not even hold a conversation," writes Oser (42), and the poet and critic thus succumb to aestheticism at the expense of the moral: "Eliot was transfixed by the tragic flaw in western culture: the stubborn breach between orthodoxy and tradition, between thought and feeling, between sensibility and conscience." As Eliot noted in his *After Strange Gods*, and cited by Oser, orthodoxy and tradition are not the same thing. In fact, much that is traditional can be outside anyone's orthodoxy. But is any orthodoxy, severed from tradition, even possible? As Eliot concludes, "The two [orthodoxy and tradition] will therefore considerably complement each other" (29).

The union between thought and feeling, far from being a breach, is exactly what Eliot most admired in the poetry of Donne and sought in his own. In Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality," Webster "knew that thought clings round dead limbs / Tightening its lusts and luxuries," just as Donne in the same poem "found no substitute for sense, / To seize and clutch and penetrate" (32). Orthodoxy and tradition, thought and feeling, sensibility and conscience all cohere for Eliot more than Oser is willing to allow.

Far from being merely a "priest of art," Eliot is one of our most di-

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dactic poets. The third part of *The Waste Land* is even called a sermon, and the thunder's rustle pronounces "*datta, dayadhvam, damyata*" (49)—give, offer sympathy, exercise control. The poem's speaker, with "the arid plain behind me," plaintively implores, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (50). These are hardly the musings, as Oser indicates, of a "gnostic remove[d] from moral life" (123). It is true that *The Waste Land* predates by five years Eliot's formal conversion to Christianity, and Oser identifies the Eliot of this poem as "a Christian skeptic" (83). But it seems to me unmistakable that the Eliot of *The Waste Land* takes Christianity with the utmost seriousness, the hanged god of the ancient fertility rites being directly associated with the crucified Christ and the figure of the "third who walks always beside you" (48) in "What the Thunder Said." The latter is identified in one of Eliot's footnotes as the appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus following his resurrection (51n46). It is true that these identities are obscured and ambiguous, but they are hardly negated or skeptically dismissed.

In his chapter "The Canon and Literary Form," Oser decries what he regards as Eliot's departure from traditional forms: "Eliot needed to attack the authority of the iambic pentameter line. He needed to reconfigure the canon while insisting, against the grain of Georgian sensibility, on his relation to it" (137). Oser adds that "when he wanted to, Eliot wrote brilliant formal verse" (137), but even so, he "was outmatched by Hardy and Yeats, and later by Auden, in the field of formal verse" (138). Free verse, where "there are no discernable [sic] social relations" (144), as in Ashbery's poetry, is like all deviations from formal verse: "an art that has no formal principle tends to elide reason, nature, and history" (145). To illustrate such assumptions, disputable as they are, I would have welcomed in this chapter a focused reading of prosody in *The Waste Land* or, for that matter, any poem by Eliot to show some ill-advised departures from regular meters and forms. What dismayed William Carlos Williams, when *The Waste Land* appeared, was not its unregulated free verse but the fact that Eliot, "being an accomplished craftsman, better skilled in some ways than I could ever hope to be," carried "my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy" (174). The power of Eliot's blank verse in "A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many" in part 1 of *The Waste Land* (39), or the meeting of the clerk and typist in part 3 (43–44), where that section's original drafts presented iambic pentameter quatrains in alternating rhymes and still retains them partially in the lines that were not excised,

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give testimony to that very craft that Williams admired and dreaded. It is of course the interplay of voices and rhythms—prophetic and colloquial, portentous and cockney—that make up the uniqueness of *The Waste Land*. Oser has little to say about the formal qualities of *Four Quartets*, but if he did he would have to discuss Eliot's ingenious use of accentual verse (as Helen Gardner long ago demonstrated) throughout the poem, his variations on the sestina, Dantean terza rima, octosyllabics, syllabic verse, or his brilliant use of rhyme, for example, in part 4 of "East Coker."

In the end, it is Oser's uncertainties about Eliot that lead him to conclude: "It is a delicate question whether he [Eliot] should be credited with a refinement or with a revolution of taste" or "[Eliot] is not a traditional poet, he is a poet of the tradition" (142). The latter statement I would rephrase with respect to Eliot's formal qualities and to the content of his work as well: he is an original poet of the tradition. That is quite different from Oser's conclusion that, at least prior to his conversion, "Eliot replaced nature with an order of his own, a fleshless order built out of great books" (123).

Early in his book, Oser asserts that the "argument" of his presentation is that "Christian humanism conserves the radical middle between secularism and theocracy" (5). That is a sound proposal for the author and a challenging program for Christian humanism. I found myself wondering over and over, "What does Oser think of the two or three generations that have followed Chesterton, Eliot, and Tolkien?" If these are the "fathers" or the "models" of a new and possible Christian literary humanism, who among their successors have availed themselves of those rich resources? There is little or no mention in this book of writers like Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, the Christian W. H. Auden, the early Robert Lowell, Evelyn Waugh, Geoffrey Hill, or even parts of Seamus Heaney. I cannot fault the author for not having written a different book, but the premises of his book inevitably invite such speculation.

With Chesterton, Eliot, and Tolkien before me, and some of these successors equally in mind, I want to end this review with some brief speculations of my own about a mode of discovering a "radical middle" between secularism and theocracy. I find myself turning to Chesterton himself and to *On Orthodoxy* in particular, the work by which he is probably best known today. There is a remarkable chapter in that book called "The Ethics of Elfland" that retains its freshness and relevancy now, a

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century after its composition. Here Chesterton proposes a dichotomy between law, order, necessity, and tendency on the one hand, and charm, spell, enchantment, and mystery on the other. It will come as no surprise to those who know his work that Chesterton comes down on the side of the latter. But it isn't really a matter of choosing between "law" and "enchantment" in Chesterton's view, because the former is merely a "codification" of what is in really the latter anyway. The marvelous and miraculous world in which we live, the mysteries of which science can never displace, is like an imaginary world or a world of fairy tales. Our own response to it should be like the child's, one of awe, wonder, incredulity, and personal pleasure. The world of "reality" is no different in its manifestation of the marvelous from the world of the "imagination": to the former we have merely grown accustomed. Of course fairyland is also peopled by threatening ogres and monsters, counterparts of which are recognizable everywhere in the waking world we all occupy and all of whom must be combated.

It is precisely here that the poetic imagination resides as a radical middle. Our wonder at the astonishing world about us should, Chesterton believes, inspire us to something else:

In short, I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought that perhaps it involved a magician. And this pointed a profound emotion always present and sub-conscious; that this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller. (*On Orthodoxy* 59)

These are Chesterton's words, but the poetry of Eliot and the fantasy fiction of Tolkien surely embrace it. Tolkien constructs a cosmology of monsters and heroes where wonder is constantly evoked even if it is threatened. Eliot's own visionary world unfolds throughout his career from "mermaids singing, each to each" to the hyacinth girl before whom the speaker looks "into the heart of light, the silence" to the rose garden where the "pool was filled with water" and the "lotos rose" and "The surface glittered out of heart of light." For all three of these writers and many who have followed them the supernatural and the natural inform and validate each other and suggest how magic can point to a Magician.

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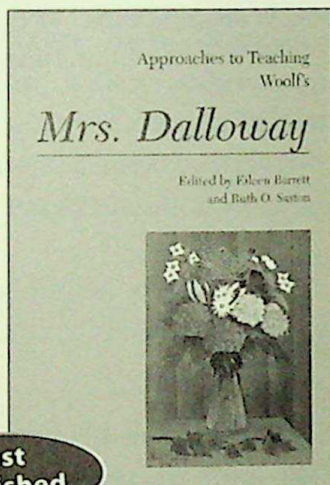
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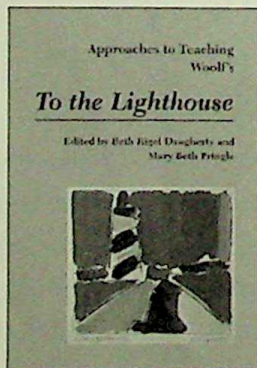
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Degenerate Sex and the City:

Djuna Barnes's Urban Underworld

Thomas Heise

In a remarkable but largely overlooked 1918 interview with New York City Police Commissioner Richard Enright, Djuna Barnes made this stunning admission: "some of the nicest people I know are either potential or real criminals" ("Commissioner" 301). Before the interview was over she reiterated: "I have a lot of friends, as I before said, who are either potential criminals or criminals" (304). Barnes's so-called criminal friends were the gays and lesbians who were part of her social milieu in Greenwich Village in the 1910s, where she resided before relocating in 1920 to a similar community of American expatriate sexual dissidents on Paris's Left Bank, whose lives she memorialized in *Nightwood*. Richard Enright was the commissioner who publicly pledged to stamp out the "depraved tastes" of the "new underworld" in the Village, to make it "unattractive to the sightseer" and restore it "to its previous status as a respectable residential and business neighborhood" ("Enright"), which it had been in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, before the likes of Barnes took up residence there. The interview ends with Enright breaking out in uncomfortable laughter as Barnes, apparently, sits silently relishing her minor triumph, her brief disruption of the procedures that police the geographical borders of sexual difference.

The Village's "new underworld" was a real and imagined territory of prostitutes, gay men and women, and bohemian artists and writers. The trope of a criminal, socially disruptive, and morally licentious sexual underworld in Greenwich Village appears repeatedly in sociological, urban-planning, and popular discourse in the interwar period, when Barnes was writing articles for numerous New York newspapers. Though Greenwich

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Village in the 1910s and 20s is remembered for its sexual, social, and aesthetic freedom and experimentation, a proper accounting of this period is not complete without understanding the geographic and discursive forces that constructed, regulated, and quarantined the spatially and socially marginalized populations whose liberation has been celebrated in many cultural histories.¹ These forces included the City Practical urban-planning movement of the 1910s, the emergence of a new nighttime leisure economy in the Village, the heated gentrification battles in the neighborhood between Italians, gays and lesbians, and a new class of urban corporate professionals, and the campaigns by civic reform societies and the New York Police Department to prosecute queer subcultural sexual practices. Out of these forces emerged what writers and reformers labeled a sexual underworld. An investigation of the social meanings of this underworld in the 1910s illuminates how sexual identities and communities are geographically constructed and how the spaces of those identities and communities are contested in the midst of a cultural sex panic.

Barnes's journalism (impressionistic sketches, interviews, and articles from 1913 to 1919, many of them collected by Alyce Barry in *New York*), and her novel *Nightwood* imagine urban space from the perspective of the marginalized neighborhoods that were targeted by municipal authorities, police, urban planners, and real estate developers. As I will argue, urban planning initiated new methods of spatial and social control to produce what Michel de Certeau calls a "planned and readable city" (93). Against the panoptic, abstract, implicitly (and at times explicitly) heterosexual spatiality of urban planners—the City Practical architects in New York in the 1910s and Georges-Eugène Haussmann in Paris in the 1850s—Barnes's was a secretive city of queer desire and pleasure. Her work underscores the erotic possibilities of a territorial politics where the sexualized and gendered nature of urban space is foregrounded, and where the relays between bodies and architectures create frictions that rub the city's dominant powers the wrong way.

Among Barnes's numerous articles, I will consider four devoted to Greenwich Village—"The Last Petit Souper," "Greenwich Village As It Is," "Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians," and "How the Villagers Amuse Themselves"—focusing on how they articulate from an insider's perspective a clandestine queer subculture. Barnes's reports form a protec-

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tive shield to the exfoliating glare of an urban discourse that demanded absolute legibility of bodies and spaces. Still, reading these articles today can be a puzzling experience. Barnes's wry, evasive style and her elaborate metaphors have led Scott Herring, for one, to declare at the outset of his strong reading of these pieces: "I cannot tell for certain" whether or not she gives "the real thing" or merely "simulates" it (160). Most scholars of Barnes's work have avoided the problem by avoiding her journalism altogether.² To get at the heart of these ephemeral, time-bound articles, I set them within a historical and geographic context that illuminates how they engage core issues of urban land use: the geographic construction of sexual subjectivity, gentrification, and street-level policing of gays and lesbians. Christine Stansell observes that while "the Village's reputation for unconventionality and sexual experimentation made it a mecca for gay people across the country . . . in the teens, mentions of gay and lesbian sexuality were heavily coded" (250).³ As I will show, Barnes adopts a tactic of coded signification; she repeatedly alludes to but declines to name the gay and lesbian subcommunity of which she was a member. By this means she rhetorically safeguards it against both Enright and the slummers and sightseers who voyeuristically traipsed through what was then a new nighttime pleasure economy—the dance halls, restaurants, and cafés in Greenwich Village.

A direct defense of the Village's sexual underworld of "depraved tastes" would have been impermissible in the journalism of the 1910s. *Nightwood* is such a defense, but on another soil, mapping the underworld of queer Americans in Paris in explicit sexual and geographical detail. It dramatizes, I argue, the quotidian, mythic, sordid, pained, and pleasure-filled histories of specific urban microgeographies in the years before the Haussmann civic clean-up campaign—when "nature had its way up to the knees" (17)—and in the years after the campaign, when an imperiled and nomadic queer underworld reterritorializes spaces in the twentieth-century city, dwelling in its degraded, submerged geographies in ways that produce new forms of erotic sociability. *Nightwood* anatomizes the underbelly of capitalist geography through a narrative that maps sexual practices in the city's unofficial spaces of pleasure—pissoirs, slums, sea-ports—where the rhetoric of unequal sociospatial relations is redeployed in the service of erotic talk.

Thomas Heise

Zoning, sexuality, and new urban amusements in early-twentieth-century America

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, urban sociological studies and urban-planning initiatives strongly argued that US cities were becoming increasingly unmanageable spaces that were in the grip of crime, poverty, and vice. Daniel Burnham, for instance, worried about “the chaos incident to rapid growth, and especially to the influx of people of many nationalities without common traditions or habits of life” (1). Similarly, Benjamin Marsh implored cities to actively control peripheral development, which was producing an unruly urban sprawl of slums, ethnic enclaves, factories, and suburbs. Urban sociologists and planners across America responded to two decades of rapid urbanization, economic recessions, and massive demographic transformation by urging a new set of scientific procedures for administering city space. These procedures were rapidly implemented in the 1910s, just as Barnes was beginning to write for New York’s dailies, and would continue to regulate city space for decades to come.

The theories and policies of expert-led urban management began to coalesce under a program known as the City Practical movement (1909–1933). City Practical planners and architects were united in a monofunctionalist vision that saw the city as a gigantic depot and distributing apparatus. Their emergent discipline was formulated in line with Enlightenment principles of reason, empiricism, and objectivity, which, when applied to the study and supervision of the city, it was thought, could result in social progress that served the general public. But from its very beginnings, urban planning was a political activity that, under the rhetoric of scientific rationality, more often than not advanced a probusiness agenda. The City Practical movement remade urban geography and imposed a new urban social order, that is, to suit the demands of modern capitalism. The class dynamics of these changes emerged clearly when George Ford, a leading City Practical architect, lobbied for planning “which will appeal to the businessman, and to the manufacturer as sane and reasonable” (qtd. in Foglesong 224).

One of the primary tools for managing urban growth and controlling unwanted populations was zoning ordinances. The first comprehensive zoning in New York City was implemented in 1916 under the auspices of safeguarding property values in middle- and upper-class districts (such as

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Greenwich Village) by limiting manufacturing and commercial establishments to poorer neighborhoods. Such ordinances represented a spatial and mathematical formulation of power, which mapped and compartmentalized the city from a top-down perspective. They created differential land uses that systematized urban geography by dividing manufacturing from residential districts in a manner that seemed "sane and reasonable" to some and regulative and oppressive to others who did not meet normative prescriptions of sexual or racial personhood. As early-twentieth-century planner Frank Koester bluntly put it, zoning's purpose was "the segregation in suitable districts of the different classes of the population" (145). In the process of creating economic distinctions by land use—some zones for commercial activity and others for private dwellings—zoning spatially constructed racial, class, and moral distinctions.

But zoning was not the only new trend on the block. The institution of zoning as a modern form of spatial control coincided exactly with an unprecedented expansion of erotically charged commercialized leisure, a major source of cultural panic and a subject that Barnes commented on repeatedly. The market expansion of the pleasure industry produced a sudden wave of new cabarets, nightclubs, dance halls, and jazz bars—in New York, many of them located in Greenwich Village. The moral alarm aroused by these spaces intensified when they were increasingly patronized by a middle class with money to spend and energy to burn. Lewis Erenberg argues that this development "marked a profound reorientation in American culture" (xiii). Mixed-sex nighttime amusements that in 1890 were considered the disreputable domain of working-class ethnic men and prostitutes had "by the 1910s . . . achieve[d] a legitimacy in urban life unheard of in the Victorian age" (61). On this note, Barnes, in her short article "You Can Tango" (1913), remarked on the recent "absolute elimination of the old-style dance hall with its flickering gaslights and furtive faces" as nighttime dancing was marketed to different clientele (13). Sydney Cohen, treasurer of the Social Centers Corporation, which managed some of the new-style establishments, proudly told Barnes that "We are endeavoring to elevate the tone of dancing and to place the dance-hall business on a clean and wholesome basis" (15). Regardless of the efforts of Cohen and the like, however, the antivice Committee of Fourteen, along with many sociologists of the era, saw the mainstreaming of illicit entertainment as a sign of "cultural decline and urban pathology" (Erenberg xiv). "The spirit of caste and convention is disappearing," *The*

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Nation lamented in 1913, observing that “A little bit of the underworld, a soupçon of the half-world—there you have the modern synthesis of New York” (qtd. in Erenberg 82). Such claims, Erenberg argues, speak to “the changing character of the American city, which offered new freedoms to people who, the reformers thought, were ill prepared to handle them” (61). Or as Ernest Burgess put it:

The great city, with its “bright lights,” its emporiums of novelties and bargains, its palaces of amusement, its underworld of vice and crime, its risks of life and property from accident, robbery, and homicide, has become the region of the most intense degree of adventure and danger, excitement and thrill. (25)

Once new residents of the city were cut off from more localized sites of social control—their rural or small-town community, their family, and their church—they were, Burgess theorized, confronted with an “intensity of stimulations” that “tend inevitably to confuse and to demoralize the person” (25).

Zoning ordinances in the 1910s and 20s, it is important to recognize, did not prohibit the city’s “underworld of vice and crime.” Rather, they made the underworld’s material production possible by setting aside a highly circumscribed and policed space for forms of sociability that did not meet strict heteronormative parameters. In Barnes’s New York, zoning ordinances established nighttime entertainment districts in the center of working-class ethnic residential and mixed-use areas where “palaces of amusement,” “submerged region[s] of poverty, degradation, and disease,” and the “underworld of vice and crime” often were overlapping, indistinguishable social spaces (Burgess 24). This real and imagined underworld was built out of urban planning’s division of space, a division that did not eliminate social pollutants but rather quarantined them in places where tawdry entertainments were concentrated. Shunting semi-illicit activities to certain zones secured the social value of bourgeois morality and domestic life. But it also created imaginary terrains where an expanding class of managers and supervisors could go on moral holidays, outlets for the disposable incomes that rising productivity and efficiency helped to accumulate.

Although commercial nighttime leisure was a newly viable sector of the urban economy, it failed to meet hegemonic prescriptions for honorable and productive conduct. If, as David Sibley argues, “Spatial

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boundaries are in part moral boundaries" (363), it is not surprising that the popularization of disreputable forms of commercial pleasure was consistently understood in spatial terms by reformers who looked for a way to visualize and contain multiple and complex urban anxieties. For instance, moral corruption from the mixing of classes and ethnicities in dance halls led Belle Moskowitz, head of the Committee on Amusement Resources for Working Class Girls, to declare in 1915, "It is simply an evil condition working upward into other strata of society" (qtd. in Erenberg 80). There was a material corollary to her panicked claim. Working-class basement beer halls began to move up to street level in order to attract middle-class patrons: "Indulging in these pleasures," Erenberg writes, "no longer required venturing beneath the street" (76). The simultaneous production and transgression of moral boundaries speaks to the amoral logic of capitalism whose search for new sources of profit is often discontinuous with the prohibitions of state-sanctioned heteropatriarchy. Early twentieth-century civic reformers and city planners worked to regulate rather than eliminate the archaic ways that capital flows assembled newly sexualized, racialized, and gendered formations. And through zoning, they helped assuage the financial crises of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century by making possible what David Harvey has termed a "spatial fix" (284) complemented by a temporal fix: the creation of new geographies of investment and profit that permitted the extensification of capitalism through spatial expansion. Zoning facilitated this expansion of capital. Through the differentiation of geographical space and by setting aside urban space in working-class areas for nighttime commercial entertainment oriented toward middle-class urbanites, zoning extended the temporal reach of capital long past the average working day.

The sociospatial transformations that segregated and divided the city were by no means uncontested by the working-class, ethnic, and sexually othered populations who saw their neighborhoods either subjected to redevelopment or turned into erotic playgrounds for white, middle-class thrill seekers who lived elsewhere. Greenwich Village, the largest gay enclave in the US by the 1910s, was the foremost site of these struggles in New York City. The Village struggled mightily with its outré reputation. The neighborhood, Erenberg observes, "had increasingly become a tourist area and nightlife zone for uptown whites" who came to "indulge in wilder forms of sensuality" and to "see lesbians and homosexuals on the streets" (252–53). I do not want to suggest that marginalized residents

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were in agreement about how best to respond to the new pressures foisted on their neighborhood. Greenwich Village was not a unified community but several communities: Italian, African American, gay, straight, poor, and middle class. Succinctly describing this sometimes tense mixture of the Village's older Italian residents and its newest inhabitants, Barnes observed "Satin and motorcars on this side, squalor and push carts on that" ("Greenwich" 225).⁴ Working-class, ethnic, and racialized men and women, as well as gays and lesbians, strategized, suffered—and by some measures benefited—differently and unequally. But each was forced to contend with the physical and discursive occupation of the intimate geography of their daily lives by forces that sought to redefine and regulate them. The sociospatial restructurings of the 1910s were national and global in their impact, but in one of the most famous neighborhoods in America, these changes could be witnessed in contests that were a microcosm of wider struggles for the right to self-definition.

Barnes and Greenwich Village in the era of the City Practical

When Barnes moved to Greenwich Village's incipient gay and lesbian community in 1915 she was, according to Phillip Herring, so barely eking out a living by writing newspaper articles that she contemplated prostitution (66). The subjects of those articles ranged widely—tango dancing, amusements at Coney Island, slumming in Chinatown, squatters in Manhattan, life in Greenwich Village—and each of them addresses the hot-button issues of the day: the city's changing demographics, gentrification battles, cultural fears, sexual curiosities, commercial pleasure. Almost without fail, Barnes's early writing focused on socially marginalized people whose abjection she consistently characterized in spatial terms, as when she described a convict on his sentencing day: one

who has slunk down dark alleys and byways and hidden in forgotten cellars and almost inaccessible garrets is flattered into bravery when he faces a crowd of good citizens as the representative of what they, in ignorance, think of as the lurid "under-world." ("Sad Scenes" 28)

Or as she said of the sideshow performers on Coney Island: "You look

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down upon these people as from the top of an abyss; they are at the bottom of despair and of life" ("Surcease" 279). For a brief time, Barnes herself was at "the bottom," but writing sustained her, allowing her to dismiss the prospect of prostitution, though commercial sex was everywhere in the Village and had been for decades. As early as 1870 Greenwich Village, called the Ninth Ward before it was rebranded by real estate interests, had a reputation for sexual eccentricity, for being "irregular," a place people come "to hide their secrets," according to James McCabe (4). Upward of a hundred brothels operated in the immediate vicinity, and by 1887 real estate agent Frank Houghton feared that the "very respectable residences and apartment houses . . . will be driven away if the evil . . . is not soon suppressed'" (qtd. in Gilfoyle 213). Barnes settled on the less respectable southern edge of Washington Square, just south of where Henry James was raised and just north of the part of the Village called Coontown or Negro Alley (Gilfoyle 214). In between one of the city's most impoverished communities and the home of one of its most prominent families, Barnes's gay and lesbian subculture would try to make a place for itself.

The radical transformation of the formerly tony neighborhood, according to James, reflected "the weight of the new remorseless monopolies" (136). Modern life in New York was becoming so mechanized that workers and residents were increasingly viewed as just another form of "property," cogs in a wheel. He did not comment on Greenwich Village's reputation for prostitution, but the language he used to characterize downtown New York could easily be extended to a critique of commercialized sex labor in a modern market economy, where the body was literally commoditized into "property" that another could rent by the hour. James's focus on "property" was apposite in another sense, for in the decade after his brief return in 1904, gentrification battles over property turned Greenwich Village into a contested terrain where many local actors fought to exert power. The population of New York City doubled from 1910 to 1930 (Douglas 4). Rapid economic expansion created new forms of community and sociability—not all of them welcomed—as it lured single men and women, in particular, to the Village. The Village was a "declining" ethnic neighborhood and center for prostitution by the time Barnes and her coterie of self-styled bohemians and gays and lesbians arrived. By the second decade, it was home to a thriving arts scene, several journals about politics and writing (*Masses* and *The Little Review*), numerous charming cafés and literary salons, and a scandalous nighttime

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infrastructure of bars and dance halls. This colorful and commercialized version of Greenwich Village drew an influx of upper-middle-class urban professionals who immediately wanted their newfound neighborhood cleaned up. The class interests of this latest wave of colonizers were advanced by massive City Practical reclamation projects that began to scrub the area—of the likes of Barnes and other short-haired women and long-haired men—and to remake its physical geography, opening it up to the downtown financial district where many of its moneyed residents worked.

With narrow, tree-lined, crooked streets that disrupted Manhattan's grid, the Village was at the turn of the century somewhat geographically isolated from the rest of the borough, which perhaps made it an ideal location for what George Chauncey calls the city's "sexual underground" (1). But a series of major construction projects in the 1910s and 20s—the West Side Highway, the widening of Seventh Avenue, additional subway stations along Sixth Avenue, and the Holland Tunnel—turned the Village into "one of the most 'passed-through' and accessible sections of the city" (Ware 15). If by 1915 the Village's gay and lesbian community was, in Chauncey's words, "part of a vast secret world" (201), it is also true that within a few years its "secrets" were made public in guidebooks such as Anna Chapin's *Greenwich Village*, from the windows of tour buses, and in the local newspapers edited by Village resident and "sensational-monger" Guido Bruno (Kreymborg 211). Bruno, who also published Barnes, displayed little or no respect for the densely textured and largely clandestine sexual subculture that gays and lesbians had created: "Here it is after the war, the 'gay corner' of New York. Did you say you wished to 'tour' Greenwich Village? You must come down in the evening," he told his readers (201). The "decline and fall" of the Village, as Milton Klonsky would later say, had already begun (267). Village denizen Floyd Dell added: "In a magazine article I pronounced a funeral oration over the Village. For this I was bitterly reproached by a Village friend whose real-estate business was, he thought, threatened by my sinister utterances" (264). The Village's status as sexually exotic was key to its marketability. But this reputation had to be carefully managed. The putative moral and physical squalor of its sexual dissidents was the source of the area's allure, but too much dirty subcultural capital limited the neighborhood's long-term appeal as a place of residence and investment. A report in 1929 announced that "The Latin Quarter . . . is no more," and observed that "once enclosed dingy alleyways, full of dingier tenements, have been sliced off at certain corners,

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opened up at others" (Rice 7). The "gay corner" was exposed in so many ways.

The City Practical reclamation projects, moreover, coincided with targeted police harassment of public expressions of gay and lesbian sexuality. The powerful Committee of Fourteen and the Society for the Suppression of Vice viewed queer sexuality and prostitution as major cultural disturbances and regularly dispatched agents to cruising areas in the Village—dance halls on Thirteenth Street, cafés on MacDougal, bathhouses on Lafayette—to file reports for Enright's police department. Accordingly, "the number of men convicted in Manhattan for homosexual solicitation," Chauncey records, "leapt from 92 in 1916 . . . to more than 750 in 1920—an eightfold increase in four years" (147). The police infiltration of spaces of queer subcultural sexuality and the City Practical's elimination of much of the Village's geographic privacy were interrelated efforts "to impose a single, hegemonic map of the city's public space on its diverse communities" (Chauncey 204), one that would transform what Burnham termed "unwholesome district[s]" (107) into high-value upper-middle-class neighborhoods. As the streets were torn up and remade around her, and as the police were making their presence felt in her neighborhood, Barnes published four articles on Greenwich Village. The year was 1916, when the Village was rezoned to protect its old housing stock. In her articles Barnes grapples with the meaning and impact of the new flows of capital and people on queer life in the area. Queer men and women in the 1910s endeavored to forge a community in the midst of a hostile environment by inhabiting—often temporarily, under threat, and with little sense of fixity—extant architectures such as bars, dance halls, and parks that primarily catered to heterosexual desire. As Barnes's writing shows, their ways of dwelling in these spaces created critical ruptures that had the potential to expose how geography is always already inscribed with sexual politics and how sexuality is always already spatially embodied and practiced.

We should note at the outset that as Barnes meditates on queer life in the Village, she finds herself in a fraught position, a formal and ideological impasse that might be framed as follows: how does one working in the medium of print journalism avoid further broadcasting the Village at a time when its physical and social privacy are severely compromised by police and land developers? To start with, Barnes publicizes the Village through her newspaper writing even as she ironizes the district's scandal-

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ous reputation and charges with hypocrisy those who impose their morality upon it. In "Greenwich Village As It Is," a title seeming to promise some lurid revelation, the reader finds any lurid wishes unwelcomingly dispelled:

But where are the records that state that all malefactors and hypocrites have been caught within the limits of what we call our Bohemia? And as for crime, have all its victims been found murdered in the beds of Waverly Place and Fourth Street? Oh! out upon it, this silly reputation about the impossible people living here. Because we let you see us . . . must you play forever the part of the simpering puritan who never heard of sex relations.
(227)

Barnes reveals unease over the publicity—"we let you see us"—to which her journalism is formally committed. As we will see, her writing constructs the Village as a real and imagined space, identifiable, even mappable, according to the precise coordinates she sometimes divulges. Yet she militates against this publicity, deploying rhetorical strategies that conceal more than they reveal. Douglas Messerli notes how "Barnes seems to go out of her way to obfuscate just that material which journalists generally employ to establish who, where, what and when—in short, the facts" (5). For Messerli this is an expression of Barnes's idiosyncratic temperament, but we might better understand her obfuscations as a response to a specific political and spatial crisis. Her rhetorical choices are freighted with political consequences, for they attempt to restore some of the sexual privacy destroyed by the City Practical and the spike in arrests of gay men for "disorderly conduct." Barnes's journalism, we might say, assembles a queer geography and then endeavors to shield and disclaim the very geography it makes visible.

Barnes engages in a coded, carefully managed portrait of queer life framed in a discourse of publicity and voyeurism. In "The Last Petit Souper" she begins:

I have often been amused—perhaps because I have not looked upon them with a benign as well as a conscientious glance—to observe what are termed "characters" going through the city and into some favorite cafe for tea. (218)

The "characters" she espies (are they real or imagined?) are "Vermouth,

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Absinthe, and Yvette—the last a girlish name” (219). “Yvette was feminine—he could not only look the part, he acted girlish in much that he did” (221), she writes, noting that his “coat was neatly shaped, frayed but decidedly genteel” and appeared to have “what must be called skirts,” beneath which his “legs swung imperially” (220). Barnes’s vignettes in “The Last Petit Souper” consist of these three highly stylized gay men flouting the imperatives of productive masculinity by spending the day eating, drinking, and daydreaming in the café culture of the Village. It’s a subject she returns to in “How the Villagers Amuse Themselves,” where an unnamed local with a “sullied reputation” and a “manicure set” sings about “find[ing] some yet-unconquered boy” (246–47). Barnes’s typecasting of gay male femininity carries an oblique political charge. Appreciating their Wildean dress—soft felt hat, scarlet lips, silver cane, long fingernails—Barnes foregrounds their beauty, frivolity, and aesthetic richness, which contrast sharply with the rest of New York. In the era of the City Practical, she declares, the city has been rendered “soulless as a department store” (225), highlighting the Village as a geography of erotic fantasy both for those “characters” who lived in and frequented the area and for those who looked upon its inhabitants with something less than a “conscientious glance.” That geography “is not permanent, the colors will fade. It is not based on good judgment,” and “people are standing before Greenwich Village murmuring in pitying tones” (“Greenwich” 224). In effect, Barnes figures its sexually minoritized residents as a residuum of artisanal production, displaced and rendered quaint by the mechanization of work and life that has reduced everything to a “flat tone and a flat surface” (“Chinatown’s” 125). “How barren and how dull becomes mere specialization,” she declares, and “How much do we owe to those of us who can flutter and find decorative joy in fluttering away this small allotted hour, content with color, perfume, and imported accents” (“Last Petit Souper” 218).

Barnes’s four articles adopt a variety of rhetorical strategies, producing a portrait as complex as the Village itself. Rather than characterize it as the home of “charming dabblers” (218) better suited to a prior century, as she does in “The Last Petit Souper,” in “Greenwich Village As It Is” she portrays it as a developing queer economy. In what amounts to a verbal map for the reader—“you of the outer world”—Barnes surveys the inner world of the Village’s commercial establishments (such as Polly’s and the Mad Hatter) known at the time for their gay clientele. “We have all that

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the rest of the world has in common commodities," Barnes proudly asserts, "and we have that better part: men and women with a new light flickering in their eyes" (232). Taken as a whole, Barnes's writing on Greenwich Village might be said to express the contradictory logic of capital itself. To the extent that it continually produces differences (novel commodities, uneven geographies, new forms of sociability), capitalism also tends, over time, to reduce differences through mandates for efficiency and legibility. The Village's so-called sexual underworld was bound up with this logic. In Barnes's work the Village contravenes the endeavor to formalize and quantify urban space by resisting the erasure of history, sexuality, and the body. Whereas Burgess claimed that the urban underworld's spaces "tend[] inevitably to confuse and to demoralize the person" (25), Barnes sees them producing new forms of personhood, new eroticized mixtures of sex and gender for a new economy. Surveying the streets, she observes not just "girlish" men ornamented with accessories but also "dark-eyed Italian children," "Jewish girls," "Norwegian emigrants," "a colored girl," "a Japanese servant," "beggars," and short-haired women and long-haired men ("Greenwich" 225–27), those whom Daniel Burnham characterized as "people of many nationalities without common traditions or habits of life" (1). The anarchic outcomes of economic transformation are on full display, producing what Henri Lefebvre characterizes as "spatial chaos," a heterotopia of nationalities, sexualities, and classes with the potential to be a liberating source of social transformation, bodily pleasure, religious mysticism, and imagination (63). In Barnes's journalism we find that the Village disrupts the effort to make the city "soulless as a department store" by serving as a haven for non-normative sexualities and bodies that other forces in the culture would like to erase from view.

The kind of sartorial signifiers and manners of deportment that we see in "The Last Petit Souper" exemplify what George Chauncey characterizes as the

highly sophisticated system of subcultural codes—codes of dress, speech, and style—that enabled [gay men] to recognize one another . . . and to carry on intricate conversations whose coded meaning was unintelligible to potentially hostile people around them. (4)

It was by these methods, Chauncey postulates, that gay men tactically reappropriated urban space to forge a measure of privacy in public and to

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"construct a gay city in the midst of (and often invisible to) the normative city" (23). Such tactical subversions, according to Certeau, resist an "urban discourse"—like the City Practical—in which "rational organization must thus repress all the physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it" (94). Certeau—and by extension Chauncey—places faith in what he calls a "devious" method of territorially based "consumption" that "insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant order" (xii–xiii).

Seeing queer culture as a site of resistance, Chauncey, Barnes, and Certeau may risk romanticizing its marginality, may exemplify the "sentimental utopianism" that Frank Mort contends seeks "to rescue the urban cultures of subaltern groups from their banal and degraded status" (311). From this perspective, "local cultures and small acts," Mort notes, "by their very definition constitute places of defiance to official geographies," but the semiotics of style that allowed gay men to recognize each other in public also point to a dependency on consumer culture and a rejection of the labor that permits such aesthetic and stylistic practices in the first place. Barnes presents these styles and practices as originating in a homosexually inflected sadness over the commercialization of the city's subculture in an era of mass-produced entertainment, and she sees "Melancholy [as] the only sign of loyalty to something they once believed" ("Becoming" 243). The emergence of urban nightlife as a viable sector of the economy was in truth evidence of the new social function of commercialized leisure in an era of mechanized labor. Instead of understanding the sexual underworld of New York in the 1910s as an evaporating residual community or as a fearlessly defiant new interest group, it might be understood as a modern social formation made possible by the production of an emergent queer spatial economy nested within broader transformations in American culture. What we can see through Barnes's journalism is that in New York's modern economy the Village was a site that made that economy's contradictions manifest. In the 1910s modern capitalism enabled the formulation of a queer commercial infrastructure that both created same-sex desire and catered to it even as other cultural forces sought to regulate it or wipe it out altogether. In this way the queer culture of the Village was a modern capitalist phenomenon through and through.⁵ In fact, as Lillian Faderman argues, "urbanization and its relative anonymity and population abundance" were prerequisites to even "the possibility of lesbianism" (8).

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The Village was an outcome of agglomeration economies that generated unstable clusters of new populations and new cultural formations—"On every corner . . . a new type," Barnes observes ("Greenwich" 226)—in a space marked as nonheteronormative. Looking at these "new types" in the 1910s was the pastime of slumming, a popular weekend activity in the years Barnes lived in and wrote about the area. Heeding Guido Bruno's call or following any of a number of advertisements, groups of nighttime revelers from uptown or from outside of New York City would descend on the Village's nightclubs to partake in an evening of risqué behavior. Sexual slumming was possible in the period because of zoning's spatialization of sexual difference across uneven geographies. The movement from heteronormative space—what Barnes mockingly describes in "The Last Petite Souper" as the "little home in the Fifties with its wax flowers, its narrow rockers, and its localisms" (219)—into zones of delinquent sexuality where one could encounter and engage with sexual difference was a source of both anxiety and erotic propinquity. Slumming could bring one face to face with marginalized forms of sexual practice, a frightening and electrically charged atmosphere in which one could flirt and fantasize or flee. To be sure, it did so through the lens of voyeurism and exploitation, as Barnes was quick to note. This certainly was the case for the "endless crowds of 'slummers'" (244) whose presence she records in a humorous anecdote in "Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians":

I stood on the corner of Sixth Avenue where it runs past Greenwich Avenue one night, and as I stood there a fur-trimmed woman, heavily laden with jewels, and two lanky daughters hailed me. . . . "Where is Greenwich Village?" she asked, and she caught her breath. "This is it," I answered, and I thought she was going to collapse. "But," she stammered, "I have heard of old houses and odd women and men who sit on the curb quoting poetry to the policeman." (237)

Sometimes those who ventured into the Village to see "the 'gay corner' of New York" were gay men seeking relief from claustrophobic norms in their own suburban or uptown neighborhoods, or straight men whose sexual slumming in gay clubs went beyond mere observation to some participation. Chauncey posits that slumming was "a chance" for some "to cultivate and explore sexual fantasies" (36) and for others a refuge. For example, Ralph Werther, author of *The Female-Impersonators*, exclaimed

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that since "The 'classy,' hypocritical, and bigoted Overworld considers a bisexual as monster and outcast, I was *driven* to a career in the democratic, frank, and liberal-minded Underworld" (qtd. in Chauncey 44). In "How the Villagers Amuse Themselves" Barnes writes about sexual slumming in reporting on a gay dance at the Village's popular venue Webster Hall, the very sort of place that the uptown Werther was "driven" to find. Here Alexis, a transgender boy from uptown, mourns how recent efforts to regulate nighttime leisure have made even this queer dance too clean for his tastes. According to Kevin Mumford, by 1917 antivice societies had shut down most of the illicit establishments in white neighborhoods (22–23). Those that remained were forced to present a more respectable face to the public, which they did by becoming increasingly commercialized and watered-down for a mainstream clientele, a development Barnes already observed in "You Can Tango" (1913). These days, laments Alexis, "one can sit in the gutter of Manhattan and arise covered with nothing worse than the shadow of a star" or hunt through "its most corrupt sewers" and find "nothing but a lot of castoff ethics" ("How the Villagers" 250). For him the moral and physical corruptions of queer sexuality are precisely the source of its hypnotic eroticism. He comes downtown to the Village only to discover that the kinds of sexual immersions he has sought might better be appreciated in the fescennine novels of Rabelais, which he has left on his shelves uptown. The Village, for Alexis at least, already had ceased to be the city's center of erotic transgression. "Localities and atmospheres should be let alone," Barnes declares in another article, "There are so many restaurants that have been spoiled by a line or two in a paper. We are in the same danger here" ("Greenwich" 226).

Justin Edwards calls Barnes both a "mystifier and [a] demystifier" (10) as she offers conflicting responses to the spatial crisis her work negotiates. In "Greenwich Village As It Is" and "Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians" she does go to some length to map the public spaces of queer subcultural life—noting the "night life of the Café Lafayette" (228), "the Mad Hatter" (240), "the Crazy Cat Club . . . at 64 West Eleventh Street" (229), and the "Liberal Club" on "MacDougal Street just above the Dutch Oven" (230)—giving names and exact addresses as in a guidebook for sightseers. But more often than not she is reticent. Aware that her words will further publicize the Village, courting the social and geographic dangers of commercial exploitation, she withholds information, enacting a logic of nonpublicity that is surprising for journalism. "In the basement

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is all that is naughty: spicy girls in gay smocks,” Barnes is willing to say of the already well-known Brevoort (“Becoming” 234). Of the more socially abject underworld bar “the Hell Hole,” patronized by “the sordid faces . . . of colored women and men,” Barnes says only that its “slit in the door” effectively warns day-trippers to stay away (“Becoming” 243). And of the “lost places” in the neighborhood—where the gay and lesbian communities really “amuse[d] themselves”—she is less forthcoming still. They exist, though Barnes won’t say exactly where. The gap between the underworld’s material context and its cultural representations—between the daily and perhaps mundane life of gay men and women making do in the city and the fantastical sexual intrigue and oddity reported in the press—remained large, and Barnes preferred it that way. “Becoming Intimate” concludes by declining the intimacy its title seems to promise:

No, I shall not give them away, but I’ll locate one of them. . . . It is a basement this side of Sixth Avenue. . . . This is real—this is the unknown. Even a basement has its basement, and this is one of the basements below Bohemia. (240–41)

In sum, the social construction of the sexual underworld in the 1910s was driven by years of economic disinvestment and uneven development. This new queer underworld was defined by the shifting moral valences assigned to space so that some urbanites were “simpering puritan[s]” and others had “sex relations.” In transgressing boundaries, slumming reinforced the association of homosexuality with a degeneracy that was reassuringly endemic to a specific locale. When new opportunities for land speculation and residential gentrification arose, the Village’s queer spaces were subjected to the “remorseless enforcement of sanitary regulations” and outright police harassment (Burnham 107). Zoning ordinances and stepped-up police surveillance worked to eliminate queer life or push it further underground, below the new “flat surface,” the spatial textures that arise from the intricate symbolisms and imaginary realms of marginalized populations (Lefebvre 42). Barnes reveals how the movement of capital redefines and redifferentiates space with little or no regard for its inhabitants, and she responds to this by representing the Village from an insider’s perspective that mediates between the “outer world” and the neighborhood she is hesitant to reveal. For her, authentic queer life was contingent on being submerged, unknowable, hidden from the prying eyes of the Belle Moskowitzs. Ultimately, in her prose the underworld—hidden be-

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low the basements of a “depraved” neighborhood—remained concealed: she keeps the city’s sexual mysteries mysterious in order to make them “real,” shielding her marginalized neighborhood from the modern city’s fatal exposures.

Sexual slumming in *Nightwood*’s queer city

When Barnes landed on Paris’s Left Bank in 1920 on assignment for *McCall’s* magazine, her surroundings must have seemed familiar. An extensive bohemian, and gay and lesbian, expatriate community had put down roots in the neighborhood, establishing a salon society and a vibrant café social scene that Barnes would have recognized from the Village. As Shari Benstock records, Paris was filled with a who’s who of lesbian or bisexual writers, artists, and patrons: Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach, and H.D., to name just a few. Harold Stearns, author of *Civilization in the United States*, wryly commented at the time, “You could have sworn you were only in a transplanted Greenwich Village . . . except for the fact some people stubbornly persisted in talking French” (qtd. in Douglas 109). Feeling at home, Barnes bought an apartment on the rue St-Romain, stayed a dozen years, and out of her experience wrote *Nightwood*, what Benstock calls the ultimate “cult guide to the homosexual underground nightworld of Paris” (235). But Greenwich Village and the Left Bank had something else in common: both had been subjected to massive spatial reclamation, reorganization, and redevelopment that directly impinged on each district’s so-called underworld.

A little more than a half-century before the City Practical movement in the America, Paris had been “modernized” by Georges-Eugène Haussmann. As David Pike describes it, Haussmann’s plan aimed for “the total control of the city” (251), a top-down reorganization of urban space in order to rid Paris of poverty and disease, but also moral depravity and revolutionary sentiment. One way Haussmann hoped to achieve this was through the construction of a modern sewer system that would address Paris’s infamous sanitation problems:

The subterranean galleries, organs of the great city, would function like those of the human body, without showing themselves in the light of day. . . . The secretions would take place mysteriously and would maintain the public health without troubling

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the proper order of the city and without spoiling its external beauty. (Haussmann qtd. in Pike 248)

He imagined the city as purged of its physical pollutants, the daily “secrections” of urban life—offal swept into gutters, uncollected excrement, garbage piled on streets—all safely, “mysteriously” shuttled away, leaving the surface world undisturbed.

If Haussmann was able to dream of a properly ordered surface where people and products, capital and labor, circulated as smoothly as “pure and fresh water” (qtd. in Pike 248), it was only because he had first dreamed of disturbing the world aboveground, tearing up the narrow streets and crowded neighborhoods of Paris and revamping them into a legible modern system. According to François Loyer, the problem for Haussmann “was one of creating a hierarchical, poly-nuclear city whose successive centres were to reflect their respective roles” (156). In short, Paris needed to be “transformed into a rational city”—and, as Certeau writes, the “rational organization” of space “must . . . repress all the physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it” (94). To spur economic expansion and the embourgeoisement of Paris, and to help make the city revolution-proof, Haussmann’s urban renewal program called for the wide-scale destruction of working-class apartment blocks and slum housing as well as numerous twisting streets that created traffic congestion and were easily barricaded by rioters. Furthermore, Paris was partitioned into twenty *arrondissements* to facilitate policing and tax collection. Paris’s divisions geographically inscribed class, ethnic, and sexual differences, making them more visible and facilitating their management by governmental power. In Loyer’s words, Haussmann’s “immediate preoccupations” were “greater legibility and differentiation” (157).

After Haussmann, *Nightwood* seeks to dirty the city up once more by imagining it as a site of cultural, sexual, and physical decay, devolution, and degeneracy. In this regard, the ambitions of the text are twofold: to evoke the finely granulated textures, smells, and sights of a pre-Haussmannized Paris “before hygiene was introduced” (*Nightwood* 17) and to show that even in the modernized, post-Haussmann city there remain underworld enclaves where city residents amuse themselves. *Nightwood* achieves these aims through the cross-dressing quack Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O’Connor. His long, breathless monologues, tantamount to verbal slumming tours, preserve the unofficial histories of Paris that

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were endangered by Haussmann and map contemporary Paris's queer underworld, where intimate practices are quarantined to hidden locales in the late hours of the night. Barnes's ideas about space, sexuality, and cleanliness, first formulated in her New York journalism, thus find an expanded platform in *Nightwood*. Both urban-planning discourse and modern sexology equated dirty spaces and dirty bodies, polluted geographies and polluted body parts. *Nightwood* does not deny these equivalences but instead plays them up, exposing and demystifying them. Barnes tracks how sexual difference is spatialized, disclosing how it is materially written into the city by zoning and discursively instantiated through theories that see moral and physical deterioration resulting from prolonged exposure to a hyperstimulating environment. As Dianne Chisholm observes, *Nightwood* never offers a narrative of healthy homosexuality that might counter the discourse that categorizes it as degenerate and ruinous. Such a narrative would merely invert the dominant culture's morality and its ethic of productivity. Scott Herring implies as much when he argues that Barnes "was suspicious of prescriptive identity categories," gay or straight (155). Instead, her narrative leads us downward through the city on a verbal joy-ride, proffering examples of filth and sexual submission, not to moralize about them but to present them in new ways: as sources of pleasure and erotic power.

We might see *Nightwood* as a narrative analogue to the photographs of the secret world of Paris that made Barnes's contemporary Brassai famous. With his stunning portraits inside gay and lesbian bars, brothels, and interracial dance halls, he captured what he labels the "colorful faces of the underworld," the "secret, sinister world of mobsters, outcasts, toughs, pimps, whores, addicts, inverters" that, he writes, was vanishing with "our century's mad rush."⁶ Barnes's underworld, like Brassai's, is racially and ethnically diverse, transnational, polymorphous, and queer in every sense of the word, but it had a staying power that her contemporary did not recognize. In Brassai's view the underworld was a residual urban culture, "folklore of its most remote past." But the complete erasure of social alterity is impossible, *Nightwood* implies, because the production of degraded folk cultures itself is an expression of capital's logic of uneven development; the city produces more and more waste even as it builds better sewers. The modern city could hardly be said to want to flush away its queer underworld in any case. As Michel Foucault argues, the modern era's disciplinary society of "infinitesimal surveillances, permanent con-

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trols, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations" (145) was designed to bring deviance into view for examination. *Nightwood*, as we will see, ironizes how "meticulous orderings of space" partition the city into moral and immoral geographies and how "indeterminate medical or psychological examinations" endeavor to shape the human body to its environment.

If Barnes in her journalism tried for an aesthetics of privacy through innuendo and indirection, in *Nightwood* she opts for full-on neobaroque semantic excess, producing an opaque narrative of digressions, diversions, and false leads. That her characters are as opaque as her narrative highlights questions of how putatively aberrant subjectivities are to be categorized and made legible, a major concern of the period. In the fantastic world of *Nightwood* identity is unstable, hybrid, indeterminate; the lines between sex and gender are blurred by men such as O'Connor who dress like women and young women such as Robin who look like boys. If, as J. Gerald Kennedy suggests, the novel tackles "the problematic aspects of modernist identity" (224), and if, as Scott Herring argues, it "refuses to offer readers any intelligible contribution to the sociological or psychological understanding of the modern homosexual" (174), it does so in the context of urban geography's relation to sexual identity. Barnes's underworld bodies are palimpsests that bear traces of the historical and material exclusions that isolate them in debased urban geographies. Reading the queer body against the grain, as a critique of urban political economy, she represents that body as a site of resistance to a modern madness for order and sexual normativity.

Nightwood thus registers a historical moment when theories of physiology and sexuality were applied to the sanitization of urban space. In the early twentieth century, urban underworld spaces were imagined as petri dishes that bred "physical disease [and] moral depravity," according to Henry Morgenthau, president of the US's inaugural Conference on City Planning (qtd. in Foglesong 204). Such sentiments had their roots in nineteenth-century European theories of cultural degeneration. The leading theorist of this protofascist discourse was Max Nordau, a journalist and physician in Paris who authored the massive tome *Degeneration* (1895). Nordau contended that the symptomology of urban-centered industrialism was hysteria, neurasthenia, and an "increase in the number of the degenerate of all kinds" (36). He posited that the "inhabitant of a large town . . . is continually exposed to unfavorable influences which

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diminish his vital powers" (35). Degeneracy was physical, could be read in the "squint-eyes, hare lips" (17), and "the unequal development of the two halves of the face and cranium" (17). It could also be heard in the voice and read on the page, as the degenerate suffers from a "distracted consciousness" and "surrender[s] himself to the perpetual obfuscation of a boundless, aimless, and shoreless stream of fugitive ideas" (21). Urbanization, Nordau concluded, promised "Sexual psychopathy of every nature": masochists will "form the majority of men, cloth[ing] themselves in feminine apparel," and women will "wear men's dress" (538–39). Regarding culture, Nordau predicted that the literature of the twentieth century will be "canal-dredging" about "submerged peoples" (13).⁷ It was as if he had seen the future and its face was Barnes.

Degeneration theory made sexual abjection visible by constellating signs of difference into an imaginary totality: "submerged peoples," an underworld inhabiting the lowest social—and in many cases physical—geographies. We would be greatly mistaken to think that such theories were exposed as a product of gloomy homophobia by the more enlightened minds of the twentieth century. Indeed, Nordau's speculations informed the urban sociology of the 1920s and 30s, which argued that in breaking down traditional kinship ties, causing personal disorganization and the release of culturally forbidden desires, urbanization produces sexual perversity. New, nonheteronormative communities were constituted in place of older forms of sociability. The long-term solution, Lewis Mumford argued, was to disaggregate the "commercial exploitation of sexual interests" and to increase the geographical separation between the "respectable classes" and "the underworld" in all of its manifold instantiations (9). There was too much sex in the city, and most of it was perverse.

The idea that reordering space, to paraphrase Foucault, was coextensive with reordering the social and individual body remained current into the new century. A new adrenal gland operation received national press coverage in the 1930s: it was supposed to get sex back on the straight and narrow by restoring "femininity and attractiveness" in women who possessed "decidedly masculine traits" (Laurence). Weighing in at well over a thousand pages, Dr. George Henry's exhaustive compilation of research into the criminal queer body, *Sex Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns* (1941), took such experiments to even greater lengths. After x-raying the pelvises of gays and lesbians, the good doctor was convinced that queers possess a different "pelvic architecture" which correlates with

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“psychosexual behavior” (1049). But more evidence was needed, and so in a chapter titled “The Gynecology of Homosexuality: Illustrations and the Need for Them,” Henry reviews “tracings” that were made by Dr. Moench, who placed “a glass plate on the vulva . . . and outlin[ed] the external genitals upon it in soft crayon” (1099). Because Moench’s method “did not embody any detail of structure,” Henry was “compelled” to make use of his “own case-records . . . from life and from measurements . . . exactly to scale” (1099). What follows are thirty-one meticulous drawings of the vulvae of lesbians. Doctors Moench and Henry literally wrote on top of the queer body, subjecting it to an invasive biomedical discourse that approaches pornography in its fascination with rendering sexual difference graphically visible.

Early in *Nightwood*, Barnes lays the queer body out on a table for the reader to examine. It is the body of Nikka, “the nigger who used to fight the bear in the *Cirque de Paris*” and who is “tattooed from head to heel with all the *ameublement* of depravity” (16). Nikka’s body is exhibited by O’Connor, an expert turned pervert, a “variant” of Doctor Henry. When O’Connor first appears in the novel, he is loudly championing the unofficial narratives of urban culture—what the official histories, written by those who are properly credentialed, exclude, denigrate, or downplay. These unofficial narratives, he says, are “the stories that do not amount to much . . . that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers . . . merely because they befell him without distinction of office or title” (15). The novel’s keeper of underworld history, O’Connor proclaims, “In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most fully captured,” adding, “cleanliness is a form of apprehension. . . . Destiny and history are untidy; we fear memory of that disorder” (118). “In man’s body are found evidences of lost needs,” writes Barnes, the needs for pleasure, history, and community (52). Revealingly, though, Nikka only appears in an anecdotal description delivered by O’Connor. In other words, he is less a person than a text. What is inscribed on his body is a celebration of sex and filth alongside “the coping of the Hamburg house of Rothschild” and “a terse account in early monkish script—called by some people indecent, by others Gothic—of the really deplorable condition of Paris before hygiene was introduced” (17). On his backside—“just above what you mustn’t mention”—flies a bird with a streamer that says “*Garde tout!*” a warning that even excrement must be kept and preserved (17). Reading Nikka’s body, Barnes, through O’Connor, shows us how we should read her novel. The braided “vine

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work" of his tattoos, "garlanded with rosebuds and hackwork of the devil," finds its formal equivalent in Barnes's contorted, looping sentences filled with allusions to classical literature and folk customs and with sudden detours into history, science, geography, and mythology, sentences that might leave one as wonderfully lost as a visitor to Paris before Haussmann plotted it so clearly (16). Nikka's body is a legend without a map, all symbols and no road. With a penis so long that "at a stretch it spelled Desdemona" (16), Nikka inhabits the racist caricature of black sexual prowess. But this caricature produces bawdy "subterranean humor" (47). To the hygienic discourses that would declare it obscene, Nikka's body writes back with a sneering laughter that takes pleasure and pride in dirty jokes and sex. "I asked him why all this barbarity," O'Connor says, "he answered he loved beauty and would have it about him" (17).

Barnes gathers her strange cast of characters around the garrulous O'Connor. Nora, in her "late twenties," is "doing advance publicity for the circus" (18) when she meets O'Connor and Felix Volkbein, an effeminate Viennese Jew who has come into the world without parents (his mother died immediately after he was born) and with few notable possessions, among them two portraits of sumptuous Florentine actors who are passed off as aristocratic ancestors (7). "[T]here were few trades that welcomed Jews," Barnes writes, so disguise and deception become survival strategies for Felix, who, also through O'Connor, meets Robin in Paris in 1920 (5). Drawn to her "fluid sort of possession" (112), Felix convinces her to marry him, only to be abandoned: "she took to going out; wandering the countryside; to train travel, to other cities" (45). After the birth of their mentally slow child Guido, their marriage dissolves, and Robin moves in with Nora, only to leave her too for the nightworld of Paris's queer social scene. Nora's long and anguished conversations with O'Connor about Robin comprise the remaining bulk of the text. Around this thin narrative skeleton, Barnes fleshes out an entire urban underworld perfumed with the aromatics of decay. Representatives of this world, Robin and O'Connor are Barnes's leading indicators of cultural degeneration. Robin's body "exhale[s] . . . earth-flesh, fungi . . . captured dampness"; she smells like the underground (34). The "I'm not neurasthenic" (33) Doctor O'Connor sleeps in "ladies underclothing" in a squalid apartment littered with "pile[s] of medical books," "a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments," and a "swill-pail" (78-79)—"a vice district in miniature" in Scott Herring's perfect description (179). The

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Doctor is “bounded on one side by the church and on the other by the court” (29), the two dominant powers that write the city’s prohibitions, but within their “bounded” space is “the doctor’s ‘city,’” from which he tells the “unexpurgated” story of how the urban is divided between day and night, sacred and profane, upper and underworld (15).

Nora’s effort to track Robin down leads her to O’Connor’s bedside at “about three in the morning” seeking advice (78).⁸ Panicked, Nora pleads, “tell me everything you know about the night,” his “favourite topic” (79–80). What she receives amounts to a counterdiscourse to urban planning. The city’s zones are divided, O’Connor tells her, but stresses that they are “related by their division” (80), that “We tear up the one for the sake of the other” (82). Paris had been partitioned, of course, into asymmetrical but interdependent domains, and the body too, O’Connor observes, has been bifurcated into clean and unclean realms, practices, and desires, resulting in corporeal alienations that need to be healed. “A man is whole,” he declares, “only when he takes into account his shadow as well as himself” (119). In his “appallingly degraded” apartment (79), he educates Nora by taking her through a verbal “detour of filthiness” (84), a slumming tour not just through space but backward in history (79). “Have you thought of the night, now, in other times, in foreign countries—in Paris,” he tauntingly asks (81). “I’ve never known it before—I thought I did, but it was not knowing at all” (82), Nora responds, quivering. In spite of her lesbianism, Nora is deeply invested in monogamy, domesticity, and cleanliness. She is estranged from what O’Connor celebrates as “the body and the blood of ecstasy, religion, and love,” and so to cure her, to move her beyond her own internal divisions, he takes her to “other times” and other spaces (118). The initial stop is the slums of the Zone, the terrifyingly degraded terrain of Montfaucon, the enormous dump and cesspit in northeast Paris where the corpses of executed criminals and slaughtered horses were disposed of. The odor was so powerful that it regularly wafted into central Paris (Pike 249). The revolting “stench . . . plucked you by the nostrils and you were twenty leagues out,” O’Connor recalls (81). Just as the queer body spills over normative parameters—Nora’s Robin is “a tall girl with the body of a boy” (35) “who lives in two worlds” (46)—“the streets” of the old Zone (81) breached conventional limits. They “were gall high with things you wouldn’t have done for dare’s sake . . . and everything gutters for miles and miles.”

O’Connor’s stream-of-consciousness monologues anatomize for

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Nora the city and its bodies as part of a bristling critique of the modern fetish for order, legibility, and hygiene. The modern urban economy will not tolerate the contradictions it generates, the coexistence of pleasure and pain, beauty and deformity. To unmoor Nora, O'Connor asks her to think through these contradictions and to experience them bodily by descending through them. This descent involves an examination of the body's internal sewer system, modeled for Nora in "the Frenchman" who "can trace himself back by his sediment, vegetable and animal, and so find himself in the odour of wine in its two travels, in and out" (84–85). "The American," O'Connor argues, "separates the two for fear of indignities, so that the mystery is cut in every cord" (85). Against a bourgeois model of selfhood that imagines the body as sealed, discrete, and impermeable, O'Connor describes a fluid, shape-shifting, queer understanding of the body in all of its porosity. Open at both ends, the body is not despoiled but merely part of the soil.

As Nora sits at his bedside, O'Connor pressures her to "take[] into account [her] shadow" (119), but such navel gazing is of limited use if it is not a conduit for shared experience with others. O'Connor's verbal slumming tour thus leads Nora and the reader into a contemporary queer underworld where bodily pleasure and bodily fluids are exchanged, where hyperstimulation aggregates the social body, joining strangers in sexual contact. The divided city thus comes together in the degraded queer architectures of the city. "I haunt the *pissoirs*"—"circular cottages" (91) in the homosexual vernacular. Through his sexual *flânerie* O'Connor has mapped the underworld of queer meeting places, where he has found not pain, as Nora does, but—crucially—bliss in the transgression of constricting social codes and discourses. Consider, for instance, his extended parody of theories of environmental determinism and degeneration. The Doctor—who by the end of the novel is "deteriorated" (114)—proclaims that he can detect "from what district they [his lovers] come, yea, even to an *arrondissement*" by the taste of their semen (92). Relating past arguments regarding "the particular merits of one district over another for such things, of one cottage over another for such things," he questions: "'Do any of you know anything about atmosphere and sea level? Well,' I says 'sea level and atmospheric pressure and topography make all the difference in the world!' My voice cracked on the word 'difference.'" Here is the geographical production of sexual difference at its most elemental. It's as if Haussmann's spatial divisions have acclimatized citizens in the most

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intimate fashions. As *terroir* is to French wine, urban topography is to the semen of queer men.

But lesbian promiscuity in the urban underworld is a source of heart-ache for Nora in a way that anonymous sex between men in criminally reappropriated spaces is not for O'Connor. Greatly disturbing Nora, O'Connor describes "girls . . . in the toilets at night . . . kneeling in that great secret confessional crying between tongues, the terrible excommunication" (95). Conjoining the figural downward damnation of the soul with the literal motion of "going down" during oral sex, O'Connor recites what he has overheard: "May you be damned to hell! May you die standing upright! May you be damned upward! May this be damned, terrible and damned spot! May it wither into the grin of the dead, may this draw back, low riding mouth in an empty snarl of the groin!" At the center of eroticism and death Barnes depicts the city's queer lovers, already damned in this world as well as the next, redundantly cursing each other. Note here what Nora cannot—secretly a pleasure, excommunication provides the very language for lesbian sadomasochism, the religious discourse turned back on itself and repurposed. For Barnes the crying in tongues at Pentecost twists into an act of cunnilingus mixed with an erotics of verbal domination reminiscent of the Marquis de Sade, Robin's favorite writer. This is too much for Nora, who yells "Don't—don't!"

Cruel but necessary, the Doctor's attempt to edify Nora about the material existence of the city's degraded geography and its role in constructing sexual personhood is achieved by wearing her down—"a bitch on a high plane" (146)—by reducing her to tears. Nora defines herself by what has been taken from her, but as O'Connor sees it, she "robbed herself for everyone" (51). Which is to say, her profound distress stems not from what she has lost (namely Robin) but from her belief in ownership at all costs, her anxiety-ridden possessive individualism. Nora believes that the only way she can secure Robin's love is by preventing her from loving others, taking sole possession of her heart instead of sharing her affection. "Die now, then you will be mine forever," she once whispered in her ear (145). As several chapter titles suggest—"Bow Down," "The Squatter," "Go Down, Matthew"—*Nightwood* commits to the principle of erotic submission and debasement, which Robin enacts when she "go[es] down" (169) on the floor before Nora's dog, "dragging her forelocks in the dust" (170). Such an "obscene and touching" moment is beyond the pale for Nora, but O'Connor persists in prying her from her old attach-

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ments, a strategy that moves toward its climax when Nora begs him to divulge the events of the terrible night Robin's new lover Jenny "laid her eyes on Robin" (99), stealing her from Nora. Propped in bed under a blanket, O'Connor mercilessly stalls and savors the moment, announcing "I'm coming to something" (90), then after a few more pages, "it's all of a certain night that I'm coming to, that I take so long coming to it" (97), and finally, "I'm coming by degrees to the narrative of the one particular night that makes all other nights seem like something quite decent enough" (99). O'Connor has in the past spoken of masturbating in the church of St. Sulpice. Here, I suggest, he is pleasuring himself by turning Nora's sorrow into a masturbatory narrative that is largely a product of the sexual energy that it binds and sustains (99). From Nora's pain he weaves a pornographic story that he tacitly asks Nora to share in, to "come to," as a means of recouping pleasure from what has been lost, taken, or denied. Isn't this *Nightwood* in a nutshell?

O'Connor's twisting and turning "detour of filthiness" makes Nora squirm, but in the wrong way. He has tried to turn pain into ecstasy by asking Nora to exchange what was never hers to begin with—Robin—with what has been hers from the beginning—her body's pleasure. The strategy fails. Robin's radically contingent and uncontainable sexual desires take her beyond the parochialisms of city, nation, and sexual identity. She leaves a trail of lovers on her European peregrinations, returning with songs "sometimes Italian, sometimes French or German, songs of the people, debased and haunting" (57). And though Barnes does not show this transnational queer underworld, we are told that Nora in an effort "to understand her" (156) has retraced Robin's footsteps. "I haunted the cafes where Robin had lived her night-life; I drank with the men, I danced with the women," Nora reveals in a quick summary, adding that she has frequented the bars of "the Montparnasse quarter" and "the streets of Marseilles, the waterfront of Tangier, the *basso porto* of Naples" (143, 157). Robin's flight is an opportunity for Nora's political knowledge and a possible condition for her erotic fulfillment, neither of which, it is important to note, are realized. Connecting her with colonized and migrant queer populations, Nora's excursions hold the potential for sexual and political illumination of the forms of intimacy, community, and danger faced by a deterritorialized queer underworld moving between cities and across national borders. But such illumination is forestalled by her despair over her individual loss. For all intents and purposes, this larger world remains a

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blank in Barnes's text. "I have been loved . . . by something strange, and it has forgotten me," Nora cries, "I will find her again" (155–56). "A broken heart have you!" (154) O'Connor says, calling her a "fool" for "going back to find Robin" (165) as if she were property to be reclaimed. In the end "the people of the underworld" (31) are not Nora's people.

Beneath *Nightwood's* narrative of estranged lovers, O'Connor sees what Nora cannot: the story of the modern city's sexual underworld, a product of punitive morality overlaying a fragmented and unequally divided geography. The truth of sexual identity is that it is deeply imbricated within modern capitalist spatiality. But in Barnes's narrative the verbal and bodily intimacies of underworld sociability never coalesce into a collectivist vision for sexual liberation or for reorganizing urban space by protocols that promote social equality or even for establishing the kind of territorial enclave that is the subject of Barnes's journalism on Greenwich Village. Instead, *Nightwood* eroticizes the city's divisions, enforcing sanitary gender and sexual norms, which produce much anguish. It does so not to confirm queer sexuality as etiolated (or as healthy), which is to understand sexuality in moral parameters, but to spotlight deviancy's social and material origins. "Those who love a city, in its profoundest sense, become the shame of that city, the *détraqués*, the paupers," Barnes poignantly writes, "their good is incommunicable" (52). The "difference" that "atmospheric pressure and topography make" is the sexual diversity that heteronormativity conceals. "To think is to be sick," O'Connor laments (158). *Nightwood* thinks through binarized formulations of geographic identity so as to understand how they produce the framework for ruptural possibilities in a culture. Barnes narrates an urban underworld of flux, recontextualization, and flexibility, opposing rigid systems of thought through disruption and reterritorialization, primary tactics of the marginalized. In *Nightwood*, the terms of exclusion are the terms of shared pleasure. Its underworld of transgressive sexuality poaches the spaces of the city, formulating a critical site to represent the multiplication of contagious intimacies.

The socioeconomic transformations of the twentieth century's first decades produced new social constructs, a new underworld. The sexual underworld was both a "real and objective outcomes of capitalist social relations" (Ferguson 10) and an ideological formation that consolidated virulent fears about crime, work, and changing cultural mores. For Barnes, this underworld became a critical site for reimagining the unequal spatial economies of the modern city. Militating against these economies, both

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her journalism from the 1910s and *Nightwood* underscore the degree to which heteronormativity depends on the disorder, madness, and cultural impoverishment of sexually minoritized populations. Sexual identity for all urban residents is geographically contingent, for it is in space that sexuality is materialized and regulated. Within the net of the modern city's regulations Barnes's polysemic underworld endures.

Notes

1. See for instance Christine Stansell, Andrea Barner, and Ann Douglas.
2. Barnes's newspaper articles have not received much scholarly attention, nor have they been adequately historicized. Phillip Herring surveys a number of them but ultimately dismisses them as being of scant interest if Barnes had not gone on to write greater things (81). Nancy Levine is attuned to the spatial dynamics of the social relations in Barnes's work but does not fully contextualize the representation of these relations or account for the deep ambivalence that structures her portrait of social marginality. Justin Edwards gives a persuasive reading of her work in the "new subgenre of travel writing" (7). He argues that

As the first woman writer to fully explore this subgenre, Barnes frequently foregrounded its narrative and performative aspects so as to engage her audiences in imaginary travelling across the abysses of class, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual identity.

Scott Herring reads Barnes's journalism and *Nightwood* as being "commit[ed] to antirepresentation" (155). He argues that

her antisapphic modernism fails to exhibit the history of a pathologized queer underworld. It obliquely illuminates how fantastic underworlds help nonnormative subjects escape this imperative to embrace a collective sexual history by putting a stranglehold on the pervasive ideal. (155)

3. In the 1910s frank or sympathetic depictions of gay life in print were still a rarity in the United States. Even a decade later, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) was a cause célèbre for its near suppression, and Barnes's own *Ladies Almanack* (1928), which depicts lesbian salon society in Paris, could not find a publisher and was hawked on the streets by her friends.
4. Caroline Ware notes that by 1910 half of the residents of the area were Italian-born and that resentment and conflict between the local Italian Catholic

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residents and the free-love and radical suffragist bohemians was common: "the local people regarded the Villagers as a menace to the decency of their neighborhood" (112) and the newer residents condemned the local Italians for having too many children and for "their noise and dirt" (112).

5. See John D'Emilio's analysis of modern capitalism's creation of a queer commercial infrastructure in US cities.

6. Brassai writes that his highly romanticized underworld is Paris "at its most alive, its most authentic"; its denizens live there "not out of necessity, but because they want to." These "pictures will certainly seem as exotic as if they were of pygmies or Zulus," he writes, even calling a homeless woman a "Cro-Magnon goddess."

7. Nordau's *Degeneration* also functioned as literary criticism, in that it developed an argument for the psychopathology of modern art. His cultural bugbears were Baudelaire, Zola, Nietzsche, Wilde, Ibsen, the impressionists, and the symbolist poets. For a study of the influences of degeneration theory on literature, see William Greenslade. For a reading of *Nightwood* and degeneration theory, see Dana Seidler.

8. The scene is a parody of the exchanges between patient and analyst that seek to undercover the etiology of sexual perversion. Jane Marcus sees Nora as the archetypal female hysteric Dora (233).

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Readerly Contingency in Bishop's Journals and Early Prose

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The poet may mean more than he knew.

—William Empson (*Letters* 215)

In 1938 Marianne Moore criticized Elizabeth Bishop's recently published prose fable "In Prison" for not revealing Bishop's convictions more explicitly:

I can't help wishing you would sometime in some way, risk some unprotected profundity of experience; or since no one admits profundity of experience, some characteristic private defiance of the significantly detestable. . . . tentativeness and interiorizing are your danger as well as your strength
(qtd. in Millier 137).

In fact, much of Bishop's work of the period, not least "In Prison," may be read as questioning the very assumptions about language and artistic intentions that animate Moore's comments. Bishop's response to Moore's critique is a touch ironic:

Thank you infinitely for what you say about my story—you can read my mind so well. I am writing another one now which I hope you will like better. It does attempt to be a little more "important." If only I could see half as clearly *how* I want to write poems. (One Art 73).

We may also sense a generational difference at play in the exchange—the early-modernist Moore chiding the postmodernist Bishop for unserious-

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ness, who in turn replies by putting the word "important" in scare quotes. Indeed, "In Prison" addresses the longing to write from a coherent and stable worldview—a sense of universal importance—but suggests, in quite comic terms, that this is possible only if one narrows the world to a prison, and one's reading material to a single "very dull" book (*Prose* 187).¹

A decade later, Bishop confidently turned the problem of assuming a universal worldview into a major subject. In "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" (1948), for instance, a traveler's mortal dread on confronting "a holy grave, not looking particularly holy" and "half-filled with dust" (*Poems* 58) is a recognizably profound experience, with a strong poetic tradition behind it: it recalls the "colossal Wreck, boundless and bare" witnessed by the traveler in Shelley's "Ozymandias." But while Shelley's poem seems unequivocally weighty, Bishop's undercuts the traveler's epiphany: a local tour guide (Khadour), in one withering line at the end of the poem's soaring central section, "look[s] on amused" (64), having witnessed this site and this inspiring "profound" realization, it seems, many times before. If we can't exactly know the source of his amusement, Khadour's blithe presence puts the scene's profundity in scare quotes, rendering it comic by suggesting its conventionality. Bishop's poem thus shifts from the traveler-poet's unique experience to an acknowledgment of the potentially endless proliferation of possible perspectives on an object or scene.² The resultant sense of contingency is summed up in the following strophe's oft-quoted first line: "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and'" (58). What can't be assumed, the poem warns, is "complete concordance" between all possible interpretations of the site or the experience or, by implication, the poem at hand.

The above reading is not groundbreaking; critics have long noted Bishop's investment, at least thematically, in instabilities of meaning, and her refusal of totalizing perspectives.³ But how and when did Bishop arrive at this thematic, and with what attitude? Here I will argue that one important and overlooked step in the development of Bishop's mature poetic was her interest in reader theory and the instability of print: in the mid to late 1930s she specifically turned the problem of not knowing "how to write poems" into productive questions about reading and interpretation. Acutely aware of audience during this period⁴—seeing audience as too heterogeneous to allow for easy assumptions about important subjects—she considered what transpires between readers and writers in several prose works and journal entries that imagine even the most carefully constructed works of art as becoming pliable upon reception.

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While other critics have acknowledged the prevalence of such themes in Bishop's later work, most (even those sympathetic to a "postmodern" Bishop) have nevertheless read her early work as panicked by the instability of text, and even as intent to brandish craft mastery against unnerving contingency.⁵ What's been missed is the extent to which Bishop's early work views readerly contingency as not only inevitable but also as contributing to a work's success, if by success we mean its survival—its continuing to be read (and perhaps misread).⁶

This essay will culminate in readings of two contrasting prose works: the essay "The U.S.A. School of Writing" (1935–36) and the story "The Sea & Its Shore" (1937).⁷ While the former feels stalled by its concern with originality and a stultifying view of art as predictably class bound, the latter presents literary art as print—freed in reception from the limits of class, mastery, originality, or political identification (dimensions that strongly identify writing with its authorship). Contrary to the logic of craft mastery, and in ways more experimental than has been recognized, "The Sea & Its Shore" explores the idea that art's interpretive destiny can't be determined or assured. It may best be read, I am arguing, as a culmination of Bishop's idiosyncratic uses of the literary criticism she was reading during the period—that is, as marking the key moment when her early interest in textual indeterminacy gives way to a marked openness to it. Indeed, in light of the other prose material on writing and reading that Bishop produced or noted during this time, I read the story against a deep-grooved critical grain. I don't think we can read it as a "despairing fable" about writing and its products (Vendler) or as a "nightmare" account of the failure of an ordering imagination (Kalstone 61). Nor can we view the liberation of language from "the artist's will" in the story as primarily a "threatening independence" for Bishop (Parker 63).⁸ In fact, the story suggests that for Bishop, print's "chaotic" behavior was not a "terror" (Kalstone 61) or even necessarily an instance of "loss" (McCabe), views that implicitly frame the story as a typically modernist text that looks to formal order and stability as stays against unnerving contingency. Rather, in light of her interests during the era, it appears that Bishop's attitude toward multiple, unmanageable readings of her work (and print more generally) was much more open than has been assumed, and that it emerged as she cultivated an interest in what transpires between readers and writers.

This claim resists conventional periodizing tendencies, which seem to

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ill-accommodate Bishop's late-1930s work. Her views on reader theory, drawn in part from her readings of modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot and William Empson, led her to surprisingly Barthean conclusions—ideas generally cast as postmodern.⁹ I will argue that we see in Bishop's work of the 1930s a growing tendency, and then a definitive turn around 1937, toward thinking of literature not so much as impersonal (a view the conventional critical wisdom would align with Eliot and modernism) but as authorless, as print (a view that more typically registers as the province of the postmodern). One added concern of my essay, then, is to show that the particular cast of Bishop's interest in reader theory challenges the logic of understanding her work of the 30s in strictly modernist terms.¹⁰ Locating the emergence of Bishop's embrace of textual contingency late in the 30s is thus somewhat unexpected, given the critical expectation that such attitudes are historically occasioned and determined by post-World War II concerns.¹¹

The 1930s is a period when Bishop vacillates between identifying writing (literary endeavor and literature more generally) as something to be experienced and something to accomplish, master, and control. This tension is evident in much of her work of the period, indicating her personal struggle with a rather overbearing sense of what literary mastery might afford her. Installed after college in the New York Public Library to study her chosen craft masters, Bishop imagined herself determining what were "the poet's proper materials" and how to "proceed from the material . . . eaten out with acid, pulled down from underneath, made to perform and always kept in order, in its place" (Papers 72A.1). But her journals show that she was also in the process of realizing that despite being "made to perform" properly, an artwork "cannot be made to indicate its spiritual goal clearly." Amazingly, this shift occurs in the middle of a single journal entry in 1935. While thinking in terms of a "spiritual goal" might imply the "profundity of experience" that Moore wished Bishop would express, Bishop's comment also indicates resistance to the ideal of poetic expression. A "goal" is both an intention (an aim) and a projected end. Does she mean to suggest that a work "cannot be made" by a writer to express her intentions clearly, or that it "cannot be made" by the reader to reveal its intentions? As Bishop frames it, the work's origins and ends can't be forced into identity; intentions can't be traced back to an original point or fully realized by the reader.

Material in the Bishop archive at Vassar College suggests that this idea

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preoccupied the poet for several years in various forms. In the mid to late 30s her work sometimes seems heavily invested in the idea of poetic genius and all the control over poetic product that such a paradigm assumes; at other times it takes an interest in how reception complicates that paradigm. In my view, "The Sea & Its Shore," like "In Prison" (and her 1938 poem "The Monument"), marks Bishop's full embrace of that complication. As the earliest of these three works, "The Sea & Its Shore" signifies a pivotal moment when vacillation develops into fruitful poetic concern and experiment.

The notion that neither readers nor writers fully control the interpretive fate of writing would likely have been quite useful for Bishop throughout the 30s, for as critics have long noted, she was conflicted and anxious about releasing her work into the world (Millier 135). Fantasizing total textual freedom rather than control may very well have enabled Bishop to write, allowing her some release from overbearing aims and expectations. In fact, Bishop was proud to call "In Prison," the very fable Moore criticizes, an example of the "proliferal style"—a neologism that appears nowhere else in her work (*One Art* 71). Part *peripheral*, part *proliferate*, the word gives us an apt figure for Bishop's somewhat surprising reimagination of the relationship between artist and audience during this era: the artist standing on a periphery, releasing the work of art into the world, and watching it proliferate readings she never intended.¹² It is a figure we can see her enjoy and experiment with, mirrored by that of the reader-writer in "In Prison," who is permitted to "experience with a free conscience the pleasure, perverse, I suppose, of interpreting [text] not at all according to its intent" (*Prose* 188). This view of reading as pleasurably liberated from the charge to divine authorial intention is the inverse of Bishop's reimagination of writing in the mid-30s—writing as liberated from having to function as a repository of authorial intentions. The one figure in fact necessitates the other in "In Prison"; its artist protagonist (like Edwin Boomer in "The Sea & Its Shore") creates new art on his prison walls by reusing and reassembling fragments of text not at all according to their original intent.

On that note, I must acknowledge that the intentions I ascribe to Bishop are, of course, partly my invention, and the struggle between duty to authorial intention and readerly freedom is, in no small way, my own critical problem. I spent time in the archives at Vassar College, surveying the wealth of material Bishop produced in her years just out of college

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and up to the publication of *North & South* (1947). I pored over reprints of the material one summer and mused over them for longer. The Elizabeth Bishop Papers at Vassar are carefully curated, but various factors—gaps and oddities in Bishop's own record keeping, the inevitable uncertainties and shuffle that attend any archival order—made me acutely aware that in writing about such material, I couldn't help but ascribe plots and hierarchies to isolated pieces and fragments, the validity of which can never be verified by the archive, let alone by the author. Each paper I took up, initially foreign and isolate to me, began to seem related and, the longer I looked, to tell an important critical story. To her least sympathetic critics, Bishop's response to the contingencies of reading and reception could be described, at best, as a "worried continuing" (Perloff, "Normalizing") in the face of modernity's untidy activity—a "drive . . . toward meaningful statement" characteristic of conservative late modernism. And yet what I find in Bishop's work of the 30s suggests that, however invested she was in making meaning, she also enjoyed and even needed the idea that the afterlife of her published work was open to the play of chance. As I've indicated, other critics have described a Bishop open, at least thematically, to the play of chance (usually with reference to later work), but without providing an account of when and where this interest arose or locating it in her early thoughts about textuality. Once we do that, I think we can begin to imagine a Bishop who imagined relinquishing that "drive" not as a threat but as a liberation.

Journals 1935–1937

Contrary to the critical portrait of a Bishop for whom the liberation of text from the artist's will is a terror, Bishop's journals show that at an early age she rather courted the accidental as an aesthetic possibility. In her earliest writing (college and just after), she still conceived the issue as a subset of the writer's control over her "materials." In other words, she wanted to find a way, as an author, to arrange for a fluid, open text. In one journal entry, for instance, she indicates feeling unhappily constrained by the critical expectation that fictional narratives neatly cohere, frustrated by the idea that "all events which could be explained only by accident or coincidence were . . . [to be] apologized for, as if they showed some fault in the author" (Papers 70.9). An author might include, that is, incidental material to strengthen a work; Bishop was keen to imagine a form of

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writing that could approximate and recognize instabilities of meaning rather than fix them. She writes in "Dimensions for a Novel," her 1935 essay on form in the novel, "To do justice to one's sense of characters, events, thoughts I think . . . they [should] be presented in such a way as to show [the] perpetually changing integration of what has been written with what is being written."¹³ Bishop expresses her fantastic, ideally "fluid" novel form with an illustration of a box that is all frame and no walls, underneath which she writes: "the recognition itself of what is being written must be kept fluid, as in [this] little box, not pre-determined." What the image points to (ideally) is a text constantly in the process of being written—something akin to the "writerly text" idealized by Roland Barthes.¹⁴ Contrary to the point of a Barthean text, however, the author of Bishop's fluid novel is, in her model, still very much alive and in control.

By 1938, Bishop had restaged her vision of textual freedom as a function of reading rather than craftsmanship. The image of a text constantly undergoing changes occurs most famously and interestingly in "The Monument," which depicts an art object whose formal and generic character changes—not through a feat of artistic technique but with the forces of time and reception. Bishop had turned away from the figure of the artist and toward a figure of numerous (and disagreeing) viewer-interpreters, whose differing views seem necessary to the work's life rather than destructive of it.

We have some indication that even very early, such a view of reception was on Bishop's mind. Struggling during this period with an internalized expectation that craft mastery is what ensures art's lasting effect (and critical success), Bishop wields in opposition a figure of finished art as out of the artist's control. Late in 1935, just at the point of publishing her work more widely, Bishop (who was also a painter) records a dream about "paintings that wouldn't stay still—the colors moved inside the frames, the objects moved up closer and then further back, the whole thing changed from portrait to scenery and back again" (Papers 72A.2). She does not say whether the changes derive from the viewer or the works themselves, but the image suggests her preoccupation with the idea that finished work might not function as a fixed interpretive object.

But was this dream a nightmare scenario for her, as critics have proposed? A 1936 journal entry on Henry James suggests not. There Bishop ponders (with a notable lack of anxiety) the possibility that readers can

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ascribe to a work formal qualities not intended by an author by latching on to "accidental" features of it. Reflecting on the shape of *The Ambassadors*, Bishop muses that "it might be interesting to . . . write . . . about [whether] people are affected by the beginning of symmetry, maybe accidental. If a pattern begins to form itself, do they [readers] feel impelled to push it through?" (Papers 72.A.3). The tone of interest and dispassion in the entry suggests that Bishop found the vision of a work's susceptibility to readerly contingency compelling rather than threatening. This attraction to what readers contribute to a work's interpretive afterlife is central to her late-1930s work, but it takes Bishop several years to develop the subject she first entertains in her reading of James.

One potential account of how, and with what attitude, Bishop shifts from privileging the figure of writing to that of reading emerges from the notes and writing she produced between drafting (and abandoning) "The U.S.A. School of Writing" and writing (and publishing) "The Sea & Its Shore." We can read the work she produced between these two pieces as her attempts, with only limited success, to imagine how literary works might be original and potent and yet also released (imaginatively) from the overbearing creative paradigms of authorial intention, genius, and mastery. This registers in several of the (many) abandoned prose pieces she produced during the period, including a review of W. H. Auden's "Look, Stranger!" which she titled "The Mechanics of Pretense." Here, almost against the conventional aims of the review genre, she imagines time and chance as the forces that determine a work's success, rather than the conscious choices that went into its production. In a somewhat Freudian mood, she claims that art's "pretense" is to describe an idiosyncratic "reality" (Papers 53.2), an act that depends not on an author's conscious inspiration or labor but rather on unselfconscious play. She compares original (good) artistic production to the "pretense" of children pretending to speak a foreign language. The figure of chance appears in the claim that one day, the children "inspired by the same motives might grow up to become linguists, grammarians, and travellers." Bishop's implication is that one day, the pretensions of new art might (or might not) "grow up" to fit other people's sense of "how things are." Divorcing the play of making from the work's eventual reception, the essay turns away from the notion that artistic intentions (craft "mechanics") entirely predict or explain a work's success.

Instead, the piece implies, luck and historical accident play as large, if

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not a larger, part. Bishop's illustrating parable presents the figure of Lord Byron—the inspired romantic poet, paragon of genius and intention—as an accidental sensation: “young Lord Byron, looking in the mirror, pretended to be a Byronic man, and the Byronic man, with his curls and collars, came into existence by the hundred.” This figure of poetic success skips from Byron's private, narcissistic playacting to his stunning public influence and adulation, eliding any account of the work of writing poems. It fits with a view that locates art's value not in the author's will and individual choices but in the contingency of its reception. If the reading public happens to embrace the pretense, the poet's idiosyncratic version of reality becomes conventional, necessary, real.

In its teetering between the intention to describe the power of a writer's craft mechanics and a vision of art's success as happenstantial, Bishop's abandoned review is informed by tensions manifest in contemporary literary-critical assertions that she recorded in her journals and diaries at the time. Shortly before beginning the review, she copied long portions of R. H. Wilenski's *The Modern Movement in Art* into her notebook. The notion that Auden's private and idiosyncratic play had by chance made inroads into an emergent reality resembles Wilenski's assertion in one such portion:

original . . . art . . . if apprehended by the spectator, performs for him a task which as a normal man with a normal urge toward greater comprehension and appreciation of formal order he deserves to perform himself but cannot.¹⁵ (qtd. in Papers 72.A.3)

Here Wilenski ever so slightly construes originality (art's power) as a function of a chancy mix of writing and its reception; art must be (and only might be) “apprehended by the spectator.” But Bishop must have found it difficult to reconcile this claim with another of Wilenski's edicts, also quoted in her journal: “All original art is produced without reference to the work's effects on spectators other than the artist.” Here he seems rather to affirm the idea that art's originality is apprehensible (somehow) in isolation from questions of its reception—as something autonomous and intended.

William Empson, whose *Seven Types of Ambiguity* Bishop had reread the same year, seems to offer her a critical model that could address the conflict between Wilenski's two assertions. In “The Mechanics of Pretense” she writes: “the tendency, described by William Empson, of what

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a poet writes to become real; the tendency towards 'prophecy'; obscurity; and 'influence' are all of this original act of pretense" (53.2). She evokes Empson to propose that what Auden tried for in early poems "turned real for him" (succeeded) through others' uses of it, a "reality" that was then "proved" by his being heralded as "the founder of the 'forsaken factory' school of literary language painting." While it is a "tendency" inherent in Auden's work, the work's success is an outcome that was "not in his hands" but the result, she proposes, of a larger literary "trend toward romanticism" with which his work chanced to coincide (and thus, we can infer, to prophesy). She doesn't cite a particular passage in Empson to support her assertion, but in his explanatory essay at the end of *Seven Types* he writes, "It is a matter of luck whether or not you have in your language or your supply of intellectual operations anything which, for a particular problem, will be of use" (252) and proposes that both artistic creation and critical reception depend on "apparently random invention."

In other words, both Wilenski and Empson helped Bishop to develop her sense that any evaluation of Auden's work's originality, or any account of its mechanics, would be inextricable from its having proved useful, by chance, to others. She writes:

Things gave rise to the language, now the language arouses an independent life in the "things." To the initiate, the world actually manages to look like so-and-so's poems—the poem that [the poet] first carefully fitted to "the ways of the world" himself.

(Papers 53.9)

This adaptive theory, which admits the place and power of reception into a model of autonomous art (reminding us that autonomous work is also autonomous of its author's control), reconciles Wilenski's two edicts: that the artist, while working without reference to others, might nonetheless help others to comprehend their world. It also marks a step toward imagining art as fully shaped neither by writer nor reader. And it is notable that underneath her notes on Wilenski's distinctions between "original" and "popular" art (a hierarchy that such autonomy challenges), Bishop begins a poem draft called "Papers on the Beach at Coney Island." The seed, apparently, of her story "The Sea & Its Shore," the draft features a whirl of newspapers that lends the beach its "drift" (72.A.1). This image (of writing that shapes the very look of the world it describes) aptly fits with the way Bishop at this time sees printed work freed of its author's control.

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Bishop never finished “The Mechanics of Pretense.” As a review, it never recovers from its introduction’s fascination with how the power of a work of art might be dislocated from the artist’s intentions and identity. In this it stands as an early, awkward gesture toward what her later work explores more confidently—the idea that literature (and language more generally) does not reveal a destiny originating with a writer or tradition but acts as a charged field of diverse meanings *in potentia*. The record shows that this idea, close to postmodern understandings of the death of the author and the writerly text, was available to Bishop even in the modernist critical theory she was reading (and perhaps misreading) at the time.

For instance, in a journal entry from 1938, she takes issue with John Crowe Ransom’s recent review of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* for what she understands to be its suggestion that Empson’s work attempts to settle questions of intention:¹⁶

E. isn’t showing what the poet intended . . . it isn’t that he intended a pun here or a reference to this or that passage or event there—E. tries to get the feeling in the air about the words . . . It is atmosphere [he] is trying to establish—not meanings.

(Papers 75.4.B)

Actually, Empson defines “atmosphere” in *Seven Types* as the poet’s or critic’s “consciousness of what is implied by the meaning” (18), which would accord more with Ransom’s reading and a model of intentionality. His illustration of the claim, however, strongly matches the spirit of Bishop’s interpretation. He presents a typically idiosyncratic reading of a passage from *Macbeth*, claiming that the gloom and foreboding of one of Macbeth’s speeches (its atmosphere) can be explained by a pun on rooks and crows, which plays on the fact that rooks are vegetarian and crows carnivorous. In a later edition of the book he disparages this reading as too “tidy” (20), but in fact it is typically untidy and almost willfully creative, just what Ransom objects to and Bishop enjoys in Empson—that he “admire[s] all possible complications, all muddles, indiscriminately” (Ransom 106), thus drifting from the expected critical task of tracking a writer’s intentions.

In other words, Bishop found Empson’s book groundbreaking for proposing that a poem’s potency depends in part on a reader’s openness to investigating the “feeling in the air” about the words. This notion is ex-

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plored in other passages in her journal from 1937 and 1938. For instance, just below the Ransom/Empson entry, she ponders the possibility that in a few years Auden's "marvelous" will ring as false and dated as some of the idioms in Tennyson, or sound as out of date as D. H. Lawrence's "manly." More to the point, she goes on to play with words that proliferate myriad, diverse linguistic associations. She considers "One's capabilities of forming the idea of the WHOLE of anything" and quickly reformulates the problem with different emphasis: "The IDEA of the whole of anything. THE REIGN OF CHARLEMAGNE, THE COUNTRY, THE NATION" (Papers 75.4.B). She then muses over the "simultaneous, instantaneous picture, or feeling, or even word, or physical creation, or reminiscence, that occurs to different individuals at the moment they think of any one of these three things." Her recognition that individual words (particularly rhetorically charged abstractions) produce as many associations as there are personal, ideological, and historical contexts in which to read them challenges the idea that even when a poet "drive[s] toward meaningful statement," he or she secures a single meaning for all readers.

Bishop's fascination with reception in this period makes it difficult to imagine that she ever found the notion of readerly contingency threatening. In her early essay "Dimensions for a Novel," for instance, she pushes against the idea that symbols necessarily point to one transcendent truth. Rather, their meanings are contingent on the contexts in which they are encountered:

A symbol might remain the same for a lifetime, but surely its implications shift from one thing to another, come and go, always within relation to that particular tone of the present which called it forth. (Papers 70.9)

Increasingly over the period, she focuses less on what writing should achieve and more on how it elicits varying readings. One journal entry applies another Wilenski idea, that "what we . . . perceive depends on the character of the adjustment to life which we are attempting at the time" (Papers 72.A.3), to literary interpretation, even to a writer's reading of his or her own work, as her own experience suggests: "Even from day to day I think the levels I take my own figures on change, back & forth." Her sustained curiosity about exchanges between readers and texts as being beyond even the most craft-conscious writer's management challenges the readings of Vendler, Kalstone, and Parker that frame her in strict modernist terms, anxious about relinquishing textual control.

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Bishop wrote most of the notes on reader theory that I've just discussed, including the Auden review, between drafting two major prose works: the autobiographical essay "The U.S.A. School of Writing," drafted and abandoned (for a time) in 1935, and the story "The Sea & Its Shore," written and published in 1937. Let me turn now to reading these works in order to show that "The Sea & Its Shore" reveals a Bishop not just concerned that her work, and print more generally, must fail to fully manage its reception, but also experimenting with and embracing that failure as vital to the ongoing, mutually dependent activities of reading and writing.

Whereas "The U.S.A. School" investigates the stakes of appearing in print from the perspective of an ambitious writer bent on mastery (somewhat in the spirit of the abandoned Auden review), "The Sea & Its Shore" imagines the afterlife of print through the perspective of a devoted if unsophisticated reader given to misreading the writer's intent. The story thus represents a culmination of Bishop's thinking during these years, translating personal concerns about a narrow literary market and publishing into the broader and more complex terms of modernity, its print culture, and the cultural conditions that frame writing and reading, regardless of any anxiety about managing the identity or value of her own work. That she does this not only thematically but also by positioning the story's reader to confront in herself many of the textual befuddlements that its protagonist experiences suggests that the story marks something more than a symptom of a writer's anxiety about print's instability. However subtly or reluctantly, we are invited to identify with Boomer. The story, that is, shows Bishop embracing the idea that, rather than trying to overcome the unpredictability of the routes by which literary meanings get produced, one might simply acknowledge and describe them. In this, the story marks a turn toward Bishop's mature subject.

"The U.S.A. School of Writing"

"The U.S.A. School of Writing" describes Bishop's brief postcollege employment as an instructor, under the persona of Mr. Margolies, at a correspondence course advertised nationwide in farm circulars and movie magazines. In first drafts of the essay, she constructs her stint at the U.S.A. School as an awakening to the dry realities of print culture, the moment when,

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in spite of all [she] had read and been taught and thought [she] knew about it before . . . the mysterious, awful power of writing . . . [o]r, since "writing" means so many different things, the power of appearing in print¹⁷ (Papers Draft 1 52.8)

occurred to her. Bishop portrays the politics and economics of "appearing in print" in the mid 1930s as corrupt and narrow, so that nothing about the literary scene comes out looking appealing. She frames the essay in terms of Depression politics, noting that she and the rest of her "puritanically pink" Vassar cohort took low-paying jobs after graduating because they felt "there was something virtuous in working for much less a year than our educations had been costing our families" (*Prose* 35). Her employer "mentally lick[s] his chops" over the naive college girl willing to take little pay to help him con an unwitting small-town clientele, and he dupes them, in part, by implying that Sinclair Lewis, realist champion of the lives of small-town people, is a graduate of the school (35–37). Though all of the workers are women, they must assume male names in their roles as writers and instructors.

Bishop portrays the 1930s New York literary scene as accessible only to effete mavens of high culture and shady radicals with bad literary tastes, none of whom, she implies, can (or even cares to) help the lower-class students who seek literary instruction. Her office mate, Rachel, is a caricature of rigid Party affiliation, corrupt self-interest, and bad realist taste, and Bishop herself is a "bourgeois" hothouse flower, taking "refuge in the childishness of anarchism" (40), ill-adjusted to the world she lives in. The cafeteria afflicts her with crippling indecision: "what to eat, what table to sit at, what chair at the table" (38).

We can only speculate as to why Bishop abandoned this essay, but it is tempting to imagine that she couldn't bear the sardonic and awkward pretension to authority that the job and her essay about it elicited in her. The school's students, who looked to the 23-year-old Bishop as an authority on writing publishable prose, reflect a particularly pathetic version of her own often-insecure professional aspirations and reliance on Moore's "indefatigable" efforts to edit, approve, and place her finished work.¹⁸ Figuring herself as a removed, judgmental mentor at such a tender moment, in view of her own correspondence with Moore, may well have proved uncomfortable.

While the essay reflects Bishop's interest at the time in the afterlife

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of printed material, it also seems stalled by a view of print's course as predictable along rather strict class lines. Most disturbing is its implication that literary endeavors are merely narcissistic (remember her portrayal of Byron's mirror play in "The Mechanics of Pretense"). Everyone in the essay is a would-be writer, and no one seems to care much about reading. Writing neither gratifies nor helps the poor, uneducated students who seek Bishop's instruction; most start and end their course associating writing with a poorly defined mix of fame and moral rectitude. "To be printed, and to be 'famous,'" Bishop writes of their motivation, "would be an instant shortcut to identity, and an escape from solitude, because then other people would know one" (44).

In what resembles a perversion of Moore's suggestion that Bishop's writing should express profound and personal convictions, the students take fame as the prize for identifying the moral lesson at the heart of their own experiences: "My students seemed to be saying: 'Our experiences are real and true and from them we have drawn these unique, these noble conclusions. Since our sentiments are so noble, who could have the heart to deny us our right to Fame'" (46). Disdainfully, the essay frames these views as embarrassingly naive. In the process, it suggests that making "noble" or even "unique" art is no longer a viable aspiration for artists of Bishop's class and moment. While her students believe that art should forward a "grand . . . moral," thus drawing writers and readers together in like-minded communities of conviction, their "high-class" teacher prefers *The Waste Land* and thinks of art as a means to "ward off society" (46).

What seems to bother Bishop most is that as an educated artist championing the virtues of the imagination (over realism), she might nonetheless have nothing to offer the would-be writer who does prize imagination (remembering Wilenski) but isn't sufficiently schooled in the canon to flourish. Among the letters she copies out is one from Mr. James O'Shea, which, she writes, "express[ed] the feelings of time passing and wasted, of wonder and envy" (48). She admires O'Shea's writing for its "classical primitive style" (47), and though she doesn't say so, we sense that it's the likelihood that he'll never succeed that depresses her. We may take the letter to be real, as she had copied it out in a journal entry and in an earlier draft of the essay from the year before:

I am thinking, of being able to write like all the Authors, for I believe that is more in my mind than any other kind of work,

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for I am concentrating on the lessons, frequently, many times.

Mr. Margolies, I am thinking of how those authors, write such long stories of 60,000 or 100,000 words in those Magazines, and where do they get their imagination and the material to work upon.

I would be very please to write such stories as those writers.

I know that there is a big field in this art.

I will do my part to be successful. (Papers Draft 1 52.8)

In the essay, it is after receiving Jimmy O'Shea's letter that she quits. His "partly sincere ambition" (*Prose* 48) sharply contrasts not only with the student writers' longing for their work to define them in the public eye but also with Bishop's own confused sense of what "appearing in print" might gain her. There is a curious tension between the fact that Mr. Black and Rachel value and envy her for her "career in print" and the fact that her skill and reputation hardly matter—after all, the operation is a sham, and Bishop has to assume the role of Mr. Margolies, which "had been the name, not of my predecessor, but of the one before the one before that" (36). Promised in one draft that after Mr. Margolies's students graduate, "I could turn into *myself*, if I wanted to," Bishop raises the question of what the self has to do with good writing or reputation anyway (Papers Draft 2 52.8). While her students see literary endeavor as a shortcut to identity, the essay suggests that the "power of appearing in print," even for the "cultured" writer, might indicate little more than a desire for self-report and fame. Being published, moreover, doesn't attest to a work's quality or its potential to survive, as the murky history of the chain of Mr. Margolieses attests: Mr. Margolies "had had something published, too," Bishop writes, without identifying which Mr. Margolies, "although I never succeeded in delving deep enough into the past history of the school to find out what it was" (36). She also indicates that she has searched for years in vain for evidence that her best student's work has been published.

Finally, "The U.S.A. School" is plagued by its vision of potential writers and audiences isolated in rigidly defined classes of taste and literary markets, none of which Bishop seems inclined to enter. It proposes that class always determines writing quite predictably, both in creation and reception, and it wavers between Bishop's assertion of superiority over her naive students and her identification with their literary longings, without

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ever quite deciding on its tone. If there is a prose work of Bishop's that "despair[s] over writing and its products," I'd argue that it's the "U.S.A. School" rather than the fable-like stories she takes up in its stead.

"The Sea & Its Shore"

Bishop put "The U.S.A. School" aside until the late 1950s, and it wasn't published until 1983. But one of its elements, the letter from the ambitious Jimmy O'Shea, reappears as a bit of airborne detritus collected by Edwin Boomer, a "man . . . appointed to keep the sand free from papers" (*Prose* 171) in "The Sea & Its Shore," the story Bishop wrote and published in 1937. This reappearance manifests the thematic link among the prose works she drafted during the period, and it evinces her growing openness to the unpredictability of a printed work's reception. As a valued windblown fragment, the letter suggests what the "Mechanics of Pretense" couldn't quite imagine—the possibility that the novice effort might not inspire a class of adoring imitators or a withering critique, but might nonetheless survive as print, whose uses and interpretations remain utterly outside the writer's purview.

"The Sea & Its Shore" reads as Bishop's effort to recast the narrow, factional view of literary life that pervades the "U.S.A. School" in terms of a broader social situation. She seems to mobilize Boomer's attention to the literal afterlife of print in order to release her conflicting allegiances—to tradition, to the narrow channels of literary reputation, and to her social conscience—into new imaginative currents. For while Boomer is isolated, poor, and apparently uneducated (like the students in "The U.S.A. School"), the frustrations of his literary life are very much Bishop's as well, though she pointedly reframes them in terms of reading rather than writing. Boomer, like Bishop, is exposed to a surfeit of printed information that seems to shape his world, and that he attempts to assimilate. As I mentioned earlier, the seed of the piece, an abandoned poem draft called "Papers on the Beach at Coney Island," appears directly below Bishop's journal notes on Wilenski's edicts about what makes art "original" (valuable) or "popular" (not worthy):

The drift along this beach came from the land,
A thousand morning papers, late editions, spiraling spreading
Print upon the seven seas (Papers 72.A.1)

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Receiving a random flow of printed information, in his attempts to catalog these worldwide "publications" washed up to his shore, Boomer is again like Bishop, who attached numerous scraps of paper—advertisements and newspaper clippings, toy packaging and art show brochures—to the notes and quotes on reader theory that she transcribed in 1930s journals. In the 1935 journal, where she compiles news items about violent mishaps and suicides, the construction of the Eiffel Tower, a Midwestern family's refusal of federal support, and the changing demographic of taxicab drivers, Bishop writes that she wishes she had an "extra brain" to store the "odds and ends that touch my fancy" (Papers 72.A.1). That several of the stories, quotes, and advertisements Bishop collected at the time find their way into Boomer's hands suggests that the story allowed her to figure her own experience as a writer-reader collecting fragments in terms of a common situation. It is this situation—the isolation of information from experience, typified by the modern newspaper—that Walter Benjamin saw in 1939 as leading to the "issueless private character" of modern "man's inner concerns" (158)—an apt description of Bishop's own unease in the mid 1930s about how and for whom to write.

But to suggest, like Kalstone (61) and others, that Boomer is "victim" to a failed "ordering energy," or to read his isolation literally and autobiographically, is to miss how Bishop viewed his situation as inevitable and instructive rather than pathological. Whereas in "The U.S.A. School" she can only (somewhat guiltily) rehearse her frustrated affiliation with high culture, in "The Sea & Its Shore" she imaginatively identifies not with a writer isolated by class or choice but with a reader-observer, and thus with a larger modern cultural logic. Edwin Boomer functions as a figure for the modern reader, or perhaps for reading more generally: through him, Bishop's focus turns from imagining the distance between writers and readers to a general theory about language and interpretation.

Understanding this, however, involves learning how to hear the complexity of Bishop's tone. It has been typical to regard Boomer's life—the "most literary life possible" (172), as the narrator calls it—as mere social satire. And certainly the story ironizes Boomer's status as an "excellent judge" (173) of the bits of literary production he impales on his staff. Lacking the literary education that would furnish the contexts in which to adjudicate the fragments he finds, Boomer does not hesitate to classify a bit of James's *The Golden Bowl* as continuous with a newspaper piece (which Bishop had collected in her 1935 journal) about a woman who

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protests the mounting of a utility pole in her neighborhood by standing in the hole dug for it. For Boomer, these are all parts of a larger story that coheres by dint of the fact that he's reading them.

On the other hand, Boomer cannot be viewed only as Bishop's elitist lament (as is partly the case with "The U.S.A. School") over the masses' ignorance of the canon, for his responses to the fragments he finds raise again and again the question of what literature is good for. This was a serious question for Bishop, writing in the midst of the Depression, and one answer she gives is that published work is good for padding the winter coats of the poor (173). Boomer may be a cog in modernity's wheel—employed as he is "on one of our large public beaches," beset by the products of a "too rapid" "modern life" whose "presses turn out too much paper covered with print, which somehow makes its way to our seas and their shores" (172)—but as he cleans the beaches he becomes a sort of naturalist of print and paper, observing "all qualities of paper in all stages of soddenness and dryness," noting "even before the wars and murders [the] effects of yellowed corners on white pages, and outer pages contrasting with inner ones" (173–74). Thus Boomer's literary discriminations ironize (high) aestheticism's remove from political and social concerns even as they speak to the ignorance and naïveté of the (low) "U.S.A. School" students. His effort to shore up the fragments of modernity (our ruin?) necessitate his "isolation and self-importan[ce]" (178), produced by the sense that he can classify what he reads with reference only to himself. In other words, if his response to what he reads resembles Bishop's barbed commentary on those isolated, literary hopefuls in "The U.S.A. School," it also recalls Ransom's charge that Empson's way of reading (which Bishop clearly approved of) is solipsistic. It even ironizes the Eliotic impulse to heal the modern wasteland (so dear to the high-class narrator in "The U.S.A. School"). In short, Boomer is deeply saturated by Bishop's interests at the time.

Most important perhaps, "The Sea & Its Shore" imaginatively frees writing from a narrow concept of the literary: it conceives the fate of print in terms of chancy reception rather than willful production, imagining print's afterlife as exceeding the framing limits of intentions, class, or tradition. As Boomer observes papers in the wind, for instance, he contrasts their "favorite" manner of flight, "an oblique one, slipping sidewise," to that of a bird's flight, "inspired by a brain, by long tradition, by a desire that could often be understood to reach some place or obtain

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some thing" (174). Here Bishop distinguishes the (literal) slippage of print, which "soared up, fell down, could not decide," from the artist's mindful objective, contrasting the unmasterable afterlife of printed work with the conscious objectives of its making. This contrast, of an "unconscious," undirected flow of print toward potential "doom in the sea," with mastery, "tradition," and "desire" constellates various elements of Bishop's vacillating sense of the literary: print's uncertainty in the public realm, the fear that writing poetry entails overweening self-display, her studies of tradition, and her sense that even when "made to perform," art "could not be made to indicate its spiritual goal."

Of course, freeing writing from class necessitates freeing it from authorial identity, as other critics have noted. Where an artist invests hope and purpose in print, Boomer's egoless print fragments are "not proud of their tricks, unconscious of the bravery, the ignorance they displayed, and of Boomer waiting to catch them on the sharpened nail" (174). Here Bishop refers her own taste for oblique commentary to the mindless course of print itself, imaginatively liberating writing from the literary and political tests of character and "personal conviction" (as Moore demanded) to which she feared her work would be held. Boomer's nail is remarkably telling: as an emblem of the unsympathetic critic, it is countered by one of the fragments that Boomer catches on it—chapter 3 of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, where Coleridge takes critics to task for exerting too great an influence on the public's taste (Coleridge 48–49; Bishop, *Prose* 176). Boomer's central questions—"But what did these things mean?" and "where do [authors] get their imagination?"—reiterate Bishop's ongoing critical concerns about art's "intrinsic" and "acquired values" (Papers 72.A.3 on Wilenski), the contingencies of meaning raised by Empson's attention to linguistic "atmosphere," and her own conscious and unconscious debts to literary mentors. If, for instance, a writer "gets his imagination" (Jimmy O'Shea's phrase, read by Boomer in the now-published letter) from other texts and writers, is the art that results "original" (created in a vacuum, "produced without reference to the work's effects"), or "popular" (and therefore a reflection of the larger culture, newspapers and all)?

After reading Wilenski's *The Modern Movement in Art* and deeply engaged in her own Boomer-like studies, Bishop wrote that she wanted "to make, just for my own edification and satisfaction, the same sort of analysis and cataloguing of literature—or possibly just poetry" (Papers 73.A.1).

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But her portrayal of Boomer's efforts to catalog indicates her realization along the way that the project of comprehending a tradition for the purpose of making "original" art was impossible, or at least severely limiting. As Kalstone notes, in the fable print is not manageable (61); it is autonomous and infecting (like the painting Bishop dreams), appearing to "fly from the pages . . . headlines and sentences streaming around [Boomer] like a . . . flock of pigeons" (*Prose* 175). Boomer is so saturated by print and so shaped by his studies that "the world, the whole world he saw, came before many years to seem printed, too" (178), as though his very perceptions were fundamentally citational. A sandpiper on the shoreline looks "to his strained eyesight like a point of punctuation against the 'rounded, rolling waves.' It left fine prints with its feet" (178). Why Boomer quotes "rounded, rolling waves" is not clear, but we can take the point without nailing the citation; little that he sees escapes the look and feel of something he has read.¹⁹

This image of textual proliferation suggests an answer to the question of whether Boomer represents, as Vendler argues, Bishop's anxious impulse to "make it cohere"—that is, to redress the instability of meaning. Make what cohere, the story asks? Though Boomer marvels at "the hundred shapes that play" in his mind's eye (a line from Phineas Fletcher's 35th stanza of canto 5 of *The Purple Island*), the story implies that he cannot get outside the texts that have defined his world, all of which enter it at random and yet shape his perceptions of it. In this sense, the "Sea & Its Shore" suggests that there is no locus from which to confirm, enact, or deny the coherence that "the" lyric is said to effect. Bishop takes pains in the fable to make Boomer a symbol of the contingency of literary meaning and value: his excellence as an assembler of his master text is contingent (to a comical degree) on the narrow scope of what he has read.

But in light of her journal entries on the contingency of reception during this period, it seems unlikely that she experienced print's freedom, and the happenstantial course of text, as a "nightmare" loss of control. "The Sea & Its Shore" may in fact represent Bishop's relinquishing the desire to control how her work is received. For if Edwin Boomer represents print's instability—that time- and class-bound reader whose interpretations shape the work's meaning—he also functions as the agent of the printed word's survival, the reader who, by quoting and misquoting, sustains the life of a work. Years later, Bishop would find instability a source of amusement in rereading her own work. In 1977 she reported

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that her early poem "Roosters" had "caught up to her;" reading it to a group of friends, she "suddenly realized it sounded like a feminist tract, which it wasn't meant to sound like at all to begin with" ("The Work" 320). Acknowledging the work's unpredictable afterlife, she adds: "So you never know how things are going to get changed around for you by the times."

But again, Bishop had entertained this possibility with comparable interest and amusement as early as the mid 1930s. I've tried to show that her reading notes from the era help us recover from "The Sea & Its Shore" something of her newly loosened attitude about publication, and that the story provided a way to be amused by what her cultural training would have defined as a terror. Following Boomer's responses to the texts he finds, "The Sea & Its Shore" imagines the contingency of literary meaning and value as a natural force dictating that the obscured, not very good, or lost fragment (Jimmy O'Shea's letter) might nonetheless find a reader for whom it will prove fascinating, even constituting the ground for a vision of the world. Similarly, the well-wrought masterpiece (fragments from Henry James and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner") might be subject to readings very different from conventional ones. In other words, Boomer is not unlike the eager scholar in the archive or the would-be writer in the library studying or wondering over great authors: he is a little like us all. In completing "The Sea & Its Shore" and not the "U.S.A. School of Writing"; in presenting O'Shea's fragment not as the object of Bishop's pity or Mr. Margolies's judgment but as an object of wonder for Edwin Boomer, Bishop turns from the confining limits of the literary masterpiece to the creative potential of reading.

Indeed, though Boomer appears comical at moments, his readings become more delicate and open the more he reads. At the story's climax, we learn that "the more he read, the less he felt he understood," indicating his evolution beyond that comic confidence that the meaning of the fragments is "plain" (177). The story then moves into Boomer's rather lovely, tentative interpretation of Phineas Fletcher's densely metaphorical stanza describing the anatomy of the eye with a conceit that alludes to Plato's allegory of the cave: "First his house seemed to him to be the 'one-eyed room, hung all with night,' and then it was his whole life at night on the shore. First the papers blowing in the air, then what was printed on them, were the 'hundred shapes'" (178). Despite his apparent lack of education, Boomer's reading of Fletcher's conceit notably vacillates between the ma-

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terial (his room) and the spiritual (his whole life), the particular and the general, registering a tension central to both Plato's parable and Fletcher's poem.²⁰

The story finally rejects the view that Boomer's reading of Fletcher—limited because he doesn't know the whole (rather ponderous) "real" text—violates the work's ideal form. For the climax of the story, at just this interpretive moment, is his envisioning the world and text as merged ("the whole world seemed . . . printed"); this produces not vertigo, nor a sense of entrapment in the cave—a failure to apprehend a Platonic realm of text's true intentions—but rather a longing to pay closer attention to what surrounds him. He sees a sandpiper in terms of text, and text in terms of a sandpiper, in notably poetic detail: the sandpiper "left fine prints with its feet. Its feathers were speckled; and especially on the narrow hems of the wings appeared marks that looked as if they might be letters, if only he could get close enough to read them" (178–79). This image anticipates two of Bishop's later poems about writing poetry: "The Sandpiper" (1962), where the bird reprises Boomer's close attention, by now a figure for poetic vocation (this sandpiper is a "student of Blake" [*Poems* 131]); and "Poem" (1972), where the confusions of text and world, and of memory and life ("which is which?" [176]), are central to poetic making conceived, finally, as a mode of reception. Notably, the earliest draft of "The Sandpiper," a prose sketch titled "The Sandpiper's Revenge," appears in Bishop's 1937 notebook, the year she published "The Sea & Its Shore" (Millier 337).

No doubt the story allegorizes how modern print culture frustrates any effort to identify or maintain a coherent tradition (part of what Bishop believed, just out of college, she ought to be doing). More radically, however (and this is what critics have resisted), it also challenges the idea that good art, like a Platonic ideal, would fix the terms of its reception. Indeed, Bishop wanted Boomer to come off ambiguously, a point she guarded jealously when Moore queried it. In the beginning, Boomer's progress in the dark with his rustic garb and staff make "a picturesque sight, in some ways like a Rembrandt" (172), but the story's last sentence revises the thought: "It is an extremely picturesque scene, in some ways like a Rembrandt, but in many ways not" (180). When Moore queried the last sentence as a bit "automatic," Bishop defended it as a caution *against* automatic reading:

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I have taken over, or gobbled up like a pelican, everything you suggested [about the story] except one: "It is an extremely *picturesque* scene . . ." You say you feel it to be too "automatic." In a way, that was what I meant it to be—I was, I suppose, making fun of an automatic reaction to the scene I was describing and I wanted, as the only "moral" to the story, to contradict, as quietly as possible, the automatic banal thing that one might have said: "How picturesque. He looks like a Rembrandt!" That is, the conclusion of the sentence, "but in many ways not," is really thought of as being spoken in a different tone of voice. However, if this oversubtlety . . . on my part did not make itself plain to you, there must be something very wrong and I'm going to try to change it and convey the idea a little more clearly.

(*One Art* 54)

If Boomer is not to be read "automatically" as a "picturesque" portrait (or as kitsch), Bishop doesn't want him to symbolize anything else too neatly either; it is merely a "different tone of voice" she suggests we should hear. There is a bit of irony in Bishop's telling Moore she will try to make her meaning "plain" (and in fact she does not change the draft on this point), for the story calls into question the very possibility that the meaning of representations or objects or texts could ever quite succeed in being plain. For example, after reading what seems to be advice to monks about cultivating their solitude, Boomer decides, comically, that the passage clearly refers to himself, saying "That certainly was plain enough" (176). That Bishop's "only 'moral'" is to "contradict, as quietly as possible, the automatic banal thing" underscores how centrally hers is an allegory of the proliferation of interpretive possibilities from any kind of text. The story thus quietly insists that one ought not (and cannot) expect art to function as an easy portrait, either of its subject (the "social-conscious" genre that Bishop was unwilling to undertake) or of its artists' intentions, even as readers "depend," as Boomer says he does, on authors' imagination.

Still, by proffering such arguments I must assume that Bishop did wish to produce certain meanings that would be understood by her readers—just as I wish to convince you of my reading of "The Sea & Its Shore." As much as "The Sea & Its Shore" embraces the contingency of literary value, it is also a crafted work, invested in directing its interpretations, less like Boomer's papers than like the birds—"inspired by a brain,

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by long tradition, by a desire that could often be understood to reach some place or obtain some thing." There is, I admit, a tension between the story's interest in the contingency of print's reception and its investment in making meaning, drawing on the very tradition it would level. Boomer's nightly burning ritual figures the inevitability that text will be consumed (and changed) by readers, but it also shows text as a stubborn remainder: strangely, at the end of the night, after the "conflagration [is] all over," and supposedly "all, all" the papers have been burned, we see Boomer with his "reading selected" (179). What has been saved? What could this contradiction mean? Bishop suggests both the consuming power of reading and the tenacity of text to withstand interpretation (even the destructive fire of misinterpretation), the necessary condition of its survival in the world.

These contrasting visions of text's fate are reiterated in the fact that while "The Sea & Its Shore" leaves its quoted fragments unattributed, claimed utterly by Boomer's readings (figured by the nightly conflagration), Bishop selects and arranges these fragments deliberately (we assume). For instance, the fragment selected from *Biographia Literaria*, focusing on critics' tendency to influence readers, correlates with and becomes richer in light of Bishop's interest at the time in influence, originality, and the force of interpretation on texts.

Moreover, with its use of unattributed quotations (learned from Moore?) the story functions something like a constructivist experiment. That is, it puts us in a position to notice its own devices, to recognize and test our own critical investments in textual coherence, and to feel the limits of our capacity to produce it. A reader of "The Sea & Its Shore" is placed somewhat in Boomer's position with regard to the fragments that find their way to his (and our) shore. Who will be able to identify or judge the sources of all the unattributed fragments of text, at least without some research? We may easily identify the Keats poem, but how many will have identified the fragment from Phineas Fletcher? (I had to e-mail colleagues to identify it.) If in the late 1930s the Fletcher fragment might have seemed less obscure, even then the readers of *Life and Letters Today* (the story's first publication context) could hardly have been expected to identify a footnote from among the many in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.

What should our response to these unattributed fragments be, the story very quietly asks, but it does not give a clear answer. Nailing the

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references, for instance, might give us the feeling that we've mastered the story, that our scholarly effort is repaid by the story's ripening and opening for us. Or we might feel a little as though we've fallen into a trap—that we've reestablished the very textual hierarchy that the story unsettles. Surely it would have amused Bishop that readers would likely feel a bit superior to Boomer because of his indiscriminate use of text (his referring the fragments to himself) even though they can't identify all the fragments' sources either. Susan McCabe has argued that the story's

irreverence . . . toward texts . . . is directed . . . at the maintenance of a hierarchically established literary canon that contains unbearably heavy or overshadowing models, legitimated by those who might appropriate other silenced voices . . . for self-serving ends. (64)

This may explain why, like most critics, she does not present any sources for the fragments. While we recognize her ethical concern about the drive to master a text, still the story asks: when don't we, as readers, use texts for "self-serving ends"? Failing to research the fragments' sources, do we render them "silenced voices" that we use for "self-serving ends"?

"The Sea & Its Shore" thus proceeds with a double vision. From the perspective of writing, texts are "pigheaded" (174) and determined, aimed and geared. But from the perspective of reading, texts on their own, in a brief and ideal moment, are free and useful: not "proud of their tricks," they are "unconscious" and yet "yield[ing]." Can texts survive in that felicitous free state? While this question inhabits Bishop's journals of the period, "The Sea & Its Shore" begins to seem less anxious that reading might destroy the whatness of a work (ground for despair) and more intrigued by the potential for readerly contingency to preserve its only-ever-ideal whatness. The story explores what occurs when we start to interpret a cultural fragment: are we pigheaded, driven by ideas of order to fit the fragment to our own purposes? Or can it somehow be left in its blank, egoless state? "The U.S.A. School" couldn't even imagine the question. There each literary product yields stable, predictable effects within narrow canons of taste: T. S. Eliot appeals to the young Vassar graduate, Vardis Fisher to the Marxist immigrant writer. "The U.S.A. School" offers one moment of release from this rigid binding of writers, readers, and texts, though this moment happens extratextually: Bishop doesn't say why she quits the school or why she rejects its cynical vision of publication and

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writing. It happens offstage, in a textual gap compelled by Jimmy O'Shea's poignant letter of concern about where authors "get their imagination." At that point writing stops; Bishop leaves a white space between two sections of print, and the reader is left to drift off on his or her own.

"The Sea & Its Shore" explores that gap: it becomes a school of reading where, almost in spite of its explicit goals, readers are invited to become conscious of their own designs on Boomer's fragmentary texts. One feels the oddness of reading these texts abstracted from their original contexts but enjoys the experience of text both liberated from and claimed by ego and intention. We can seek to learn "what . . . these things mean" (178) or vaguely wonder what they mean, even as we count ourselves above Boomer's limited understanding of them—in league with the Bishop we invent. While Boomer may represent reading as a determining function—the "sharpened nail," the consumer, the cataloguer, the fiery pit—that function remains, like the flight of papers, "oblique, slipping sidewise"; the story is both tender and mocking, knowing and unknowing; leveled and hierarchical, open and shut. That reception might level out all texts is (I imagine) a complex possibility for Bishop—in some ways suggesting anxiety about mass printing practices and textual proliferation, but in many ways not.

Notes

1. If in this exchange I take Moore (by comparison to Bishop) to be invested in the idea of art as a vehicle for moral comment, I do not mean to suggest that Moore's own work or poetics proposes a simplistic moralism. Here Moore may express longing for something she knows is not possible. That said, while I agree with a tradition of scholarship arguing, as Lynn Keller puts it, that Moore's "precise attention to details gives rise to perceptions that discourage oversimplification" (88–89), it may also be true, as Luke Carson has recently argued, that the late 1930s mark Moore's turn to the "stable moral values that shaped the poetry she would write" thereafter ("Republicanism" 317). See also Jeanne Heuving 150–51. Certainly Moore's frustration with Bishop, as critics (notably David Kalstone) have noted, reflects the idea that, in Moore's words from a letter written in 1937, "a thing should make one feel after reading it, that one's life has been altered or added to" (qtd. in Kalstone 57). For another view of the matter, see Robin Gail Schulze, especially 120–30, where she discusses Moore's concern in the 1930s over the "isolationist nature of poetic activity" (121), her sense of civic and moral responsibility, and her location of

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both in "imaginative power" (130). Kalstone's account of Moore's and Bishop's professional relationship is the standard. See also Laurie Goldensohn 132–61, whose account charts the complex shifts in the poets' relationship, discussing Moore's review of *North & South* from 1946, where Moore rescinds her earlier criticism, praising the very tentativeness she had objected to in the 1930s.

2. That the traveler interprets Khadour's traditional garb from her own secular perspective as a "smart burnoose" (*Poems* 58) suggests from the opposite direction the clash of their two perspectives.

3. As early as 1987, with Mutlu Konuk Blasing (101–15), scholars have identified the tendency of Bishop's poetry to "overturn the hierarchical dualities of subject and object, inside and outside, center and periphery, original and copy" (105).

4. Bishop spent several years after college studying the craft of those she considered masters, copying out and analyzing the mechanics of their work, and it seems clear from her letters, as many have noted, that she suffered anxiety both about success and about meeting the often competing demands of the literary tradition and social-conscience verse. See Millier, especially 135–38, where she reads "In Prison" as "speak[ing] painfully to the ambition and anxiety of the young writer" (135). I read Bishop as moving past her personal dread of the fate to which publishing would subject her work by envisioning a broader cultural situation for text. For a discussion of Bishop's relationship to social-conscience verse see James Longenbach's "Elizabeth Bishop's Social Conscience."

5. While Susan McCabe, for instance, sees Bishop as content to "parody escape from the groundswells of disorder" (49), she nevertheless suggests that Bishop regards "our only art" as "the writing of loss" (60). Bonnie Costello distinguishes Bishop's early poems, which she reads as attracted to the "anti-vital ideal" (*Questions of Mastery* 92), from those of Bishop's mid or late career, which she takes as more comfortable with multiple perspectives. For Costello, multiple perspectives are something Bishop's poetic only learns to "tolerate" (36). In her view, Bishop's early focus is on "the contention of perspectives in a struggle for dominance," whereas "later [in her career] Bishop will present experiential perspectives that shift and merge rather than merely compete" (37). I am in agreement with and in debt to Costello's overall account of Bishop's "questions of mastery," but I take Bishop's early work to be more open to the play of multiple perspectives than Costello does, and I see it as developing that openness through the exploration of the dynamics of reading and publication. Among critics who are less sympathetic to the idea of a "postmodern" Bishop, Helen Vendler reads her early prose on writing and reading as "despairing fables" about the instabilities of print. Marjorie Perloff reads Bishop as the

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quintessential romantic expressivist lyric poet invested in stabilizing meaning ("Normalizing John Ashbery").

6. Most critics have read "In Prison" as an allegory of the modern artist, not the modern reader. See McCabe 61, for instance. Little critical work has been done on Bishop's ideas about reading. Jonathan Ellis argues in passing that "The End of March" is "as close as Bishop ever got to a clearly defined theory of reading" (4), one, he argues, that advocates "an old-fashioned, almost Paterian, style of reading." He reads the poem as wishing for nothing but primary texts, unburdened by any need for critical gloss—and dismisses the poem's sense that this wish is "impossible" (Bishop, *Poems* 179). I take Bishop's fantasy in that poem as a reprisal of the one in "In Prison": both acknowledge that the world of texts can't realistically be so narrowed. James McCorkle discusses Bishop's critique of a culture of reading but not with reference to "The Sea & Its Shore." I discuss his essay at length in note 11.

7. It has been notoriously difficult to date the drafts of "The U.S.A. School of Writing," and critics have disagreed on its date of inception. Brett Millier dates its earliest draft from 1935, as does Robert Giroux (xix). Journal entries from that era indicate Bishop had the piece in mind, but the four drafts that survive in the archive are undated. Bishop tried to publish the piece in 1956, but *The New Yorker* rejected it. She seems to have resumed work on it in the 60s. It was published posthumously in *The New Yorker* (18 July 1983: 32–38). Many critics imply, or seem to assume, that "The U.S.A. School" was written in the 50s, when *The New Yorker* rejected it, but as I will show here, it so strongly echoes the concerns of "The Sea & Its Shore," the "Mechanics of Pretense" (Bishop's abandoned review of Auden from 1937), "In Prison" (1938) and Bishop's reading notes on narrative, criticism, and reader theory, that it seems entirely plausible that she thought through much of it in the mid 30s. For a dissenting position, see Robert Dale Parker 63.

8. Parker argues that the story challenges the romantic assumption of art's locus in the self (an argument with which I strongly agree), but he excludes the possibility that for Bishop, the resulting textual freedom implied by such a severing is both liberating and a subject of interest.

9. By "Barthean conclusions" I mean Barthes's idea of the "writerly text" that is not unique or "original" to an author but rather a "tissue of quotations" themselves activated by a reader. These ideas play out in a number of Barthes's texts, most notably in "The Death of the Author" 146. See also *S/Z* 5.

10. Bishop presents a conundrum for the view that sharp distinctions between modern and postmodern aesthetic and political concerns follow on sharply

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drawn historical lines. My sense that Bishop derives what we could call post-modern practices from modernist writers is supported by James Longenbach's argument that Bishop does so in her reading of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in her college essay "Dimensions of a Novel." Bishop, Longenbach points out, discovers a much less conservative Eliot than we find in New Critical readings of his essay, which tend to ignore Eliot's "post-Hegelian skepticism and [a] resulting awareness of the contingency of anything like impersonality" (*Modern Poetry* 23). Things get even trickier when we recall that even Marjorie Perloff, who once dismissed early Eliot's conservative, symbolist modernism (using "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to prove it [*Poetics of Indeterminacy* 117]), has in the last decade reclaimed and celebrated early Eliot, again using "Prufrock," as exemplifying the very avant-garde modernist aesthetic tendencies she once contrasted to his work and located under the rubric of postmodernism (*Twenty-First Century Modernism* 14–25, especially 24–25). That she uses the very same poem to effect this intellectual turnabout is a wonderful example of the force of readerly contingency on a work of art. More to the point, Perloff's evolving terminology helps to show that any eagerness to pin Bishop's openness to textual indeterminacy during the late 1930s to either modernism or postmodernism might blind us to the particular (and peculiar) quality of her response rather than illuminate it. For an interesting discussion of late-twentieth-century developments in the nomenclature and politics of claims made for American poets' modernist or postmodernist tendencies, see Nick Lolordo.

11. James McCorkle departs from but also affirms the tendency to assume that Bishop's interest in reception and indeterminacy only makes sense in terms of a received logic that such concerns belong exclusively to the post-World War II era. He departs from the standard view by reading "The Map" (1935) as

an anatomy of reading and of relational responses developed through reading. . . . The lyric poem, as Bishop develops it, functions as a meditation on reading, rather than in the conventional view of lyric, as individuated expressiveness. (71–72)

In a view that accords with my own reading, he then suggests that Bishop's poem for this reason "haunts Ashbery's poems" (73) and "could be considered as sitting and questioning the reading culture of the United States at mid-century" (72). I very much agree with McCorkle's move to see Bishop's mode of questioning as predicting Roland Barthes's theories about textual *jouissance*.

It is interesting, then, to note McCorkle's retreat from this position and his slip in misplacing the 1935 poem at "mid-century," as though the only way we can understand "The Map" to accomplish this mode of critique is by reading

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it as a mid-century—and thus ostensibly postmodern—poem. McCorkle even apologizes for what he fears is his anachronistic reading of the poem as a critique of reading culture:

Writing this poem in the early 30s . . . Bishop may not have intended to question hierarchy and definition; but her placement of this poem in subsequent collections suggests the centrality it came to occupy for her.
(72–73)

What he here resists—and what hasn't yet been explored by other critics—is that texts that tend to get designated as modernist or late modernist might very well have prepared Bishop for her 1930s critique of reading culture. These texts (Empson's in particular) don't neatly fit current pieties about the differences between modern and postmodern concerns. It is her very reading about reading during this era, I argue, that informs Bishop's interest in contingencies of reception, a theme she returns to and develops for the rest of her career.

For a very different and equally engaging recent reading of John Ashbery's "haunting" by Elizabeth Bishop, see Luke Carson's "John Ashbery's Elizabeth Bishop."

12. This stance appears also in one of the few poems Bishop wrote during this period, "The Monument" (1938; *Poems* 23–25). As others have observed, the most interesting thing about the monument is its antimonumentality: it is "all of wood" (25) and in decay; its very form seems ambiguous. It "may be solid, may be hollow" (24), but what it contains is hardly the point; indeed, it is valuable only insofar as it occasions more thinking, more art. Construing art as a provocation to more art rather than as a product (an idea Bishop seems to have absorbed from Wallace Stevens) allows that it might be useful without being a permanent monument either to the artist's personality or to a fixed idea. For a helpful account of Bishop's debts to Stevens, particularly in his *Owl's Clover*, in the mid to late 1930s, see Barbara Page.

13. See Bonnie Costello's "Elizabeth Bishop's Personal Impersonal" 341 and James Longenbach's *Modern Poetry After Modernism* 23–24 for discussions of how such moments reflect Bishop's subtle reading of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which she uses in "Dimensions" to fantasize a form that might register, rather than mask, "the constant process of adjustment . . . going on about the past" (Papers 70.9).

14. Again, I mean Barthes's invocation of a text whose only "unity" is the sum of all possible readings of it, inscribed in its "destination" (rather than its origin), and which can no longer be said to be "personal" ("Death of the Author" 148).

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15. This also resembles Wallace Stevens's view, articulated in *Ideas of Order* (1936) and *Owl's Clover* (1936), that the poet creates the world for which the reading public longs and toward which it turns. Bishop had been reading both works very carefully. See Page 196–211.
16. Ransom criticizes Empson for not attending more carefully to the poet's intentions: "Mr. Empson is a solipsistic critic, because he has much to say about anything, and not the strictest conscience about making what he says 'correspond' with what the poet says" (102).
17. In later drafts she revised "appearing in print" to the "printed word"—already one step away from the writer's management (Papers Drafts 3 and 4 52.8).
18. Langdon Hammer also makes this point (168).
19. Realizing the inevitably citational aspect of writing had indeed affected Bishop's sense of how her work should speak to, reflect, and draw on a literary tradition. In a letter to a college correspondent, Don Stanford, she says (sounding a bit like Boomer) that her literary material would not come from the world, which seemed to offer only material already exhausted by others' records of it: "All primary poetic sources have been made use of and we're in possession of a world made up of poetry, the natural world" (*One Art* xxiii). I take this to mean that the natural world as such was not viable poetic material because it had already been written. "For people like myself," she goes on, "the things to write poems about are in a way second-degree things—removed once from this natural world." In later work she hones her sense of the "second-degree" into a poetic problem, very often writing about the extent to which our perceptions are conditioned by what we've read or been taught. She was already engaged with thinking through the idea that a plethora of printed information blurred the difference between "primary" and "secondary" poetic material.
20. One might object that Boomer, in his misapprehension of the fragments of text that pass before him, is meant to resemble the prisoner in Plato's cave who ascribes false forms to the shadows he observes. But immediately after Boomer's reading of Fletcher's stanza, the narrator comments that "Either because of the insect armies of type so constantly besieging his eyes, or because it was really so, the world, the whole world he saw, came before many years to seem printed, too. Boomer held up the lantern . . ." (178). Raising the possibility that the world's seeming "printed" might be either a function of Boomer's subjectivity or "really" the case (an indeterminacy that can't be solved), Bishop undermines the hierarchy of literary forms, and Platonic ones too, suggested by

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the passage and Boomer's "misunderstanding" of it. That Boomer then holds "up the lantern" sounds another strong anti-Platonic note, suggesting as it does the figure of Diogenes, a contemporary of Plato's. Diogenes is said to have "dismissed [Plato's ideas] as absurd" (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*); to have lived an ascetic life "off the land," attacking conventions of power and authority (including literature); and, most famously, to have wandered the land carrying a lantern (as Boomer does) in search of an honest man.

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“Sensible of Being *Étrangers*”:

Plots and Identity Papers in *Banjo*

Bridget T. Chalk

The subtitle of Claude McKay's 1929 novel *Banjo* tells readers what not to expect: “A Story Without a Plot.” The novel reflects its setting—the imperial port city of Marseille in the 1920s, with its constant traffic of bodies and goods—in its serial narrative structure, which hinges on arrivals and departures, shifts in focalization, and the instability of the central group of characters, tramps living off the refuse of imperial trade. That these men are black, displaced, and geographically marginalized within the city suggests the ruptures of colonialism and the ways of authorities devoted to dealing with “suspect” populations. Much of the action of the novel concerns the failure of these mobile subjects to comply with what Michael Lipsky called Marseille's “street-level bureaucracy” (qtd. in Lewis 28)—its unique system of law and order in the early twentieth century—as they struggle with questions of racial and national categorization and deal with nebulous identity-document regulations on a daily basis. The novel thus provides a valuable perspective on the passport system in the interwar period and, I argue, traces the complicity of linear narrative with dominant bureaucratic discourses of identity. Reading *Banjo* in the context of McKay's own struggles with immigration authorities reveals that questions of form and content in the novel are not separable; rather, there is a fundamental relationship between the text's plotlessness and its thematic engagement with contemporary questions of identity management.

Recently, critics have read the novel as a portrait of defiance in the form of “vibrant resistance of the black boys to the forces that would contain them” (for example Edwards 206). The freedom of *Banjo* and his fellow wanderers from jobs, families, and the responsibilities of citi-

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zenship seems to elude the fixed categories created and maintained by racist oppression in the early twentieth century and to offer alternative ways of making do in circuits of nationalism, capitalism, and imperialism.¹ The title character, for example, was born in the American South but enlisted in the Canadian army during World War I, and on returning to the United States “calmly announced that he was not an American,” though his “accent, attitude, and movement shouted Dixie” (*Banjo* 9). His failure to comply with immigration protocol takes precedence over his embodiment of the American South, and the authorities act on his disavowal of national identity and deport him.² This subversive gesture, among others, does demonstrate Banjo’s resistance, but I want to focus on the novel’s representation of state strategies of exclusion and policing of identity. Though critics like Brent Edwards and Michelle Stephens have noted the forcible presence of authority in the novel, I suggest that rather than operating as a straightforward context against which men like Banjo have to struggle, state power emerges as a necessary interlocutor in daily life that challenges ideals of cosmopolitan existence and shapes the ways individuals see and react to one another. Through both structure and character, *Banjo* explores the relationship between state-imposed identity and explanatory narrative. I will first consider McKay’s specific troubles as a mobile colonial subject and then demonstrate how these issues shape questions of representation explored in the novel.

Narrating the self

The interwar period saw a proliferation of regulations concerning identity documentation in Europe and the United States. With the introduction of the modern passport system and the redrawing of national lines came many supplementary immigration rules, and the process of obtaining sufficient papers became increasingly difficult for those whose nationality and past movements were unclear. For Claude McKay, who was born in Jamaica but left for the United States in 1912, never to return, a transnational life involved serious bureaucratic complications. As a black British colonial subject and communist sympathizer, he experienced the barriers imposed by the systematized verification of identity in the United States, Europe, and Africa in the interwar years, making him a sort of expert on the restrictions and loopholes of the identity bureaucracy. While in Marseille and Morocco in the late 1920s and early 30s, McKay tried

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repeatedly to secure entry back into the United States, but as William Maxwell notes, his “concentrated, flagrant foreignness . . . as an outspoken, unnaturalized black West Indian incomer” made it difficult (“F. B. Eyes” 44). Because he spanned several suspicious identity categories and affiliations, McKay was a prime target for officials tracking undesirable subjects of questionable origin. Maxwell characterizes McKay’s travels after his 1922 trip to Russia for the Congress of the Third Communist International as “something of a forced black Atlanticism, required if not defined by bureau stop orders at US ports of entry” (45).³ British and French officials, moreover, advised McKay that his presence was unwanted in either country or their protected lands (51). During the period of *Banjo*’s composition, then, McKay was trying to secure his rights to mobility by manipulating his identity to make it seem bureaucratically legitimate.

While he was in France and Morocco, his correspondence with British, French, and American officials tried to clarify his official story so he might legally re-enter the United States.⁴ To comply with official regulations, McKay had to provide proof of his own biography—that is, to tell and document a comprehensible and legitimate story about himself with a clear point of departure and a progression of events leading to his present state. In these attempts to secure sufficient documentation, a “plot” became a necessary prerequisite for bureaucratic privilege. From Marseille in 1928 he wrote to the Commissioner of Immigration in Charleston, SC, with the hope of acquiring information about his initial voyage to the United States in “June or July, 1912”: “I should be very much obliged if I could be furnished with the data concerning my arrival at the port of Charleston on a United Fruit Company Boat from Port Antonio, Jamaica.” The letter seeks to determine such information both for himself, since he cannot remember the precise date of his entry, but more importantly for the US immigration authorities, who require a thorough and verifiable account of his movements. Notably, he arrived in the US on a vessel carrying goods from the colony of an imperial power, suggestive of the collapse in *Banjo* of colonial subjects’ bodies and goods passing in and out of the port. More telling, however, is the oddness of needing an official source to “furnish data” about his own life; McKay here registers a divide between the subject and his bureaucratic status, a characteristic of contemporary complaints about the passport system.⁵

A 1929 letter to the American Consul General in Marseille demonstrates how the bureaucracy demands a narrative. Here McKay both

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tells his story and expresses his loyalty and affiliation to the United States as a central part of his identity. Accounting for his years in the States, he writes that he first worked “in a business capacity,” then “published a book of poems with the firm of Harcourt, Brace & Co. and in the fall of the same year I had an opportunity of going to Russia to join my friend Max Eastman.” Understandably, he elides the precise nature of his activities in Russia, stressing his career as a writer over his political affiliations by moving quickly to his subsequent time in Germany and France, where he did his “literary work.”⁶ But he frames his traveling identity as one ultimately aligned with the United States:

I should like to reestablish residence in the United States, because, firstly, after spending all the formative years of my life there I came to regard it as home, secondly, my nearest relative is living there and, thirdly, I make my living by writing and selling my literary production to the American public.

After recounting the facts of his life, that is, he constructs a self-avowed affiliation with the US as an alternative form of national identity. He tells the consul that he became who he is by being in the States, that he has family ties in the country, and that he is valuable to its commercial interests.

Knowing his own national identity is questionable at best (a British subject from a colony to which he has not returned in years, he also poses a threat to British and American national interests because of his history of communist activity), McKay attempts in this letter to tell a story about himself that will qualify as a story of an American life. (This imperative to narrativize, as we will see, is countered in *Banjo*, where characters move in and out of textual focus and episodes are of little developmental importance.) The reply he receives from the consul in Marseille informs him matter-of-factly that when he applies for a visa, his information will be forwarded to the appropriate office; data about his official status will not be provided to him personally. A stable, documented identity remains elusive to McKay, and he is reminded that control over the information that constitutes his life story is reserved for bureaucratic authorities.

An incident in *A Long Way from Home*, McKay's autobiography, recalls his explanation of national identity to the consul in Marseille, but in an attempt to liberate his self-representation from state categories, he takes it a step further:

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[A man] from the British Consulate had accosted me in the street and asked whether I was American. I said I was born in the West Indies and lived in the United States and that I was an American, even though I was a British subject, but I preferred to think of myself as an internationalist . . . a bad nationalist. (300)

Claiming he is American despite his official British status, McKay brazenly asserts that national identity as a category cannot account for him because his transience exempts him from loyalty to any one nation. Determined to self-classify, he continues: "in all my traveling in strange places, I have always relied upon my own personality as the best passport. . . . I submitted to the local authority and always came out on top" (301). This playfully transgressive declaration stands in stark contrast to his letters to immigration officials and his scathing critique of nationality in *Banjo*, and these different representations of national-identity regulations suggest strategic decisions: his correspondence with authorities appeals to bureaucratic practices, his largely commercial autobiography paints him as an American author, impervious to the intrusions of authority, and *Banjo* interrogates the effects of the passport system, depicting the threat bureaucracy poses to any semblance of control over one's official identity. *Banjo*'s resistance to linear form, as we will see, refuses the sort of cohesive self-presentation required for colonial mobility in a setting marked by the incessant policing of identity.

Refusing a plot

Though McKay's explicit negation of narrative form in *Banjo* reflects a modernist interest in destabilizing traditional literary representation, contemporary critics viewed the subtitle as a mere alibi for sloppy authorship in a "negro" novel. The critic in the *Times Literary Supplement*, for example, felt that though it was "a vigorous and full-blooded piece of writing in the racy negro idiom of his previous novel," McKay

seems to know what is wrong by describing the book as "a story without a plot," which is precisely what it is . . . there is so little attempt to impose a narrative unity upon them that the mere repetition of negro characteristics is apt to make for monotony. (Review of *Banjo*)

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This categorization of *Banjo* as a “negro” novel confirms the remark of Ray, a character in the novel, that “however advanced, clever, and cultivated you are, you will have the distinguishing adjective of ‘colored’ before your name” (172). Though McKay admired modernist writers like Joyce and Lawrence, who experimented with novelistic conventions, this affinity went unmentioned by critics.⁷ The race of its author and subjects, that is, limited the way the novel was read. Like *Home to Harlem* before it, *Banjo* did not shy away from representing the “lower” pleasures in life: sex, drinking, gambling, and dancing.⁸ The risqué content of the novel became the central focus of critical opinion, and its formal innovations were dismissed as carelessness.

The concept of the “plotless” novel is elaborated by the text’s frequent claims that shapelessness achieves greater verisimilitude.⁹ As a writer, Ray often meditates on art, including the possibility of eventually representing the experiences he goes through with Banjo and his crew. Toward the end, he reflects:

Life is so artistically uncompromising, it does not care a rap about putting a hard fist through a splendid plan and destroying our dearest artifice. So the unwelcome appearance of Lonesome Blue was the beginning of a series of events that enlarged and altered greatly the impression of the Ditch that Ray had hoped to preserve. (213)

Aesthetic intention here must yield to the pressures of reality. The ironic possessive “our” before “artifice,” moreover, suggests that a linear life pattern might not be available to the sort of “illegitimate” wandering subjects represented in the novel. The unfolding of events in the lives of itinerant black men does not follow a neat pattern lending itself to a developmental plot, and only “a series of events” can describe Ray’s experiences. The mention of Lonesome Blue, a victim of bureaucratic identity regulations, as a catalyst for Ray’s realization, emphasizes the relationship between identity documentation and linear narrative form.

For Ray in *Home to Harlem*, where he initially appears, literary developments are inseparable from the tumultuous political events through which he has lived.¹⁰ Though he grew up “dreaming” and “brooding” with Hugo, Zola, and Dickens and graduated to the “scintillating satirists of the age”—Shaw, France, and Wells—after the cataclysms of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, he realizes that “he had lived over

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the end of an era . . . and . . . his spiritual masters had not crossed with him into the new" (192). His sense that the writers who had articulated and crystallized his inner drives will no longer suffice leads him not to despair but to ponder the efficacy of words, and especially form. He has "dreams of patterns of words achieving form" and wonders, in a common postwar trope, whether language will ever really be adequate again. However, the modernists reinspire him; Joyce, Lawrence, and Sherwood Anderson offer sources of fascination and connection. Traditional "story-telling had little interest for him now if thought and feeling did not wrestle and sprawl with appetite and dark desire all over the pages."

For Ray, writing is both political action and response; it redeems "the soil of life" from the cruelty of "the vast international cemetery of this century" (192–93). Ray's personal and political disillusionment stems from witnessing the violence of the US occupation of his home country of Haiti and his experience as a black man in the States, and though his Haitian background does not factor prominently in *Banjo*, his interest in racial politics and the uses of art intensifies in this second novel. Insofar as Ray voices something close to McKay's own position here, and *A Long Way from Home* does echo these sentiments, the modernist novel is figured as a critical engagement with the changing social climate that works through experimentation with form and patterns of language. In his unpublished essay "Group Life and Literature," McKay further frames himself as a chronicler of "the field of the lower depths of rural and urban life . . . I know of no colored writers truly representative of that field, excepting myself. My novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* belong to it" (9). Representing his writing as both modernist in form and realist in subject of representation, he suggests how his narrative strategies reflect and refract the setting and characters he depicts. The plotlessness of *Banjo* captures the fractured, contingent lives led by the wandering, marginalized black men who appear in the novel.

Banjo's general lack of development and resolution fulfills the promise of the subtitle. The reader follows a band of vagabonds in Marseille, loses sight of some while new members are introduced, and is left only with Ray's and *Banjo*'s decision to leave the city. The text frequently veers into narration of the past without orienting the reader, and the only organizing framework is a division into three sections. Arrivals and departures, with no structuring purpose, mark the novel, reflecting the port setting—always a temporary stopping place, never a permanent home.

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McKay announces this resistance to traditional novelistic organization as appropriate to his subject matter: "the grand rhythm of life rolled on everlastingly without beginning or ending in human comprehension, but the patterns were ever-changing, the figures moving on and passing, to be replaced by new ones" (200). He dismisses the notions of beginning and ending, employs multiple patterns of narration and dialogue, and, referring to the human traffic in Marseille as "figures," characterizes people as fungible. With goods and bodies forever streaming in and out, being checked, labeled, admitted, and refused, the port setting produces a view of life determined not by progressive linearity and individuality but by contingency and seriality.

The Marseille McKay describes performed a central role in the definition of French national identity in the early twentieth century, as France's material relationship to its colonies, in the shape of goods and bodies, was mediated through the flow in and out of the city docks.¹¹ International exhibitions took place in Marseille in 1906 and 1922, where, Helen Meller writes,

the very concept of European civilization became defined within a narrow framework of an Imperial nation, defining its culture against the "barbarism" that was presumed to exist in economically underdeveloped countries. (151)

Cultural and national pride was constructed and maintained through the traffic of colonial goods and the accompanying implication of their origins as backward and definitively other to the urban centers of the French imperial nation. A city official described the 1906 exhibition as "the gathering of the public gaze on the natural riches of the earth, of our colonies, and of manufactured goods that metropolitan civilization has sent back in return" (qtd. in Meller 170). The management of the identity of the French nation through trade exchanges, therefore, was both conceptual and material, and the regulations surrounding identity documentation served a crucial role in the port's functioning. By dint of its function as a gateway, the port served as a site rife with those who failed to be legitimate in the eyes of French authority, those who came when they shouldn't and refused to leave when they should.¹²

McKay delineates the challenges to Marseille's policing of national definition through the sheer multitude of otherness that seeps into the port:

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white men, brown men, black men. Finns, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes, deportees from America for violation of the United States immigration laws afraid and ashamed to go back to their own lands, all dumped down in the great Provençal port, bumming a day's work, a meal, a drink, existing from hand to mouth, anyway anyhow, between box car, tramp ship, bistro and bordel.

(*Banjo* 4)

In this passage McKay demonstrates two sources of danger to the maintenance of French national identity: the potential of being overrun by difference and the practice of leeching off the system without contributing to the interests of state. According to Lewis, the Marseille police in the early twentieth century, known as police *d'état*, were

responsible for counterespionage and passport control, abating drug and contraband traffic, and preventing theft of merchandise from open-air docks—all of which was made more difficult by the city's constantly rotating population. (28)

McKay represents the "great Provençal port" not as a grand symbol of the French Empire but as the site of the excluded, and the characteristic spaces of the city are the distorted, seedy mirror images of ocean liners, restaurants, and hotels. Alongside the dominant trade economy of the port, the marginalized characters in the novel create alternate economies, selling passports on the black market, consuming goods that fall through the cracks in the docks, and forming a musical band that performs not for money but for food, wine, and the pleasure of playing.¹³ The multiracial and multinational population that lives between temporary abodes and odd jobs in Marseille poses challenges to the stability of categories employed by French officials to control labor, traffic, and crime.

Banjo's refusal of a developmental plot constructs a particular logic that accounts for those who do not fit into the organization of modern civilization, whose stories cannot be assimilated to national or domestic arrangements. In other words, the ways in which *Banjo* might be said to participate in a modernist narrative tradition are directly related to the ways in which it arises from the interwar conditions of identity management. *Banjo's* self-deportation at the beginning of the novel launches a series of events in a life that follows not a narrative pattern but a trail of

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contingent, odd incidents, “just one different thing of a sort following the other” (22). To extract oneself from legitimate identity categories leads to alternative conceptions of one’s life story: “I’m just a right-there, right-here baby, yesterday and today and tomorrow and forever. All right-there right-here for me now” (28). Banjo considers his identity to be constructed out of multiple sites and moments of existence in which past, present, and future are collapsed; he lives in a state of dispersal that defies traditional temporal coordinates on which developmental narrative operates, ensuring that no documentary apparatus can account for his movements.

Manipulating identity

It is clear from the numerous instances of policed and criminalized black identities that the novel is centrally preoccupied with the inability to be legitimately documented and therefore legal. From the patron of the bar to a religious black American woman sponsored by the French consul to Lonesome Blue, a tramp who tries to survive without documentary support, the novel chronicles how modern black experience abroad is mapped by struggles with identity documentation. Throughout *Banjo* the danger of total control by bureaucratic and police authority gradually eclipses the communal pleasure to be found in embracing the “primitive joy” (49) of an African heritage in the Ditch.¹⁴

Banjo depicts individuals challenging the classifying mechanisms of imperial capitalism that delimit their identities. Border crossings and port checks largely create legitimate identity categories; they constitute rather than merely confirm identity. One of the men in Banjo’s crew, Ginger, is so named as a direct result of colonial trade: “His mother had been a cook for a British missionary and from the labels of his case goods, for which she had a fondness, she had taken his Christian names” (3). Ginger’s “Christian” name derives directly from profitable British trade, suggesting that colonial “missionary” work is inextricable from imperial gains. In Marseille Ginger becomes a master manipulator of the labels of identification, demonstrating that in this system, identity isn’t defined by some interior nature but can only be negotiated externally:

Of all the English-speaking Negro boys, Ginger held the long-term record for existence on the beach. He had lost his seaman’s

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papers. He had been in prison for vagabondage and served with a writ of expulsion. But he had destroyed the writ and swiped the papers of another seaman. (3)

A figure produced between and among forces of colonial exchange, Ginger is both constructed by the imperial bureaucratic circuit and a troubling presence in it.

Even private citizens imagine themselves as authorized to track identity and demand explanatory narratives, especially of black men, through passports and worker's permits, and to make them “sensible of being *étrangers*” (53). A black owner of a bar recalls angrily that a white Frenchman “wanted to know everything about me. Wanted to see my papers. Like a policeman . . . these French people are just like detectives. They want to know everything about you, especially if you're a black” (63). Inured to this treatment, one character expresses the futile wish to “make my way somehow while everything is going on without me studying them or them studying me” (18). While for the state the preponderance of illegal inhabitants justifies the enforcement of identity documentation on the street, in the novel this drive to police poses the greatest danger to black men. In this site of deportation for North Africans who had served France in World War I, all black subjects are subject to suspicion and criminalization on the basis of nothing else than their skin color. Ray, brutally beaten and incarcerated for no reason, “had become used to being searched in the Ditch . . . [W]ith the identity card regulation and the frequent rafles [police raids], the French police had unlimited power of interference with the individual” (227). The “street-level bureaucracy” (Lewis 28) of Marseille disproportionately applies to black characters, whose presence in the port destabilizes the construction of French national identity through the illusion of imperial exchange.

Challenging state imperatives of identity and mobility, *Banjo* rejects American national identity and epitomizes the life of a vagabond outside of the suffocating systems represented in the novel.¹⁵ Opposing the reflexive racial classification operating on the streets of Marseille, he

simply would not see life in divisions of sharp primary colors. In that sense he was color blind. The colors were always getting him mixed up, shading off, fading out, running into one another so that it was difficult to perceive which was which. (147)

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By calling Banjo "color blind," McKay emphasizes the acuity of the racial gaze operating around him, and his "blindness" strains against rigid categorizing authority throughout the novel. The logic of the passport system, McKay thus suggests, is internalized and active in everyday interaction, not just at port checks or by appropriate authorities. Despite his occasional circumvention of the categorizing forces of the novel, however, Banjo still suffers from their implementation. When he falls ill, he finds his previously liberating state of "denationalization"¹⁶ threatening to his life. In trying to get him admitted to the hospital, Ray finds that without an order from the police, Banjo will be barred from care. The police want an identity card, "which no beach boy could get" because no beach boy could demonstrate stability in either residence or labor.¹⁷ Ray protests, "you won't let him die because he hasn't got an identity card" (210). This extended episode, as well as a similar plight faced by Goosey, suggests how documentation prevails over the body it legitimates; Banjo is saved only because of Ray's more cosmopolitan skills with the French language and the middle class.¹⁸

These crises, and allusions to others like them, occur in the latter part of the novel, darkening the early depiction of the happy, carefree life of the Ditch. The subversions of the system enacted earlier in the novel increasingly give way to criminalization of the beach boys' way of life. Though individual characters stage instances of resistance to bureaucratic constructions of identity, the brute authority they face allows no final vision of hope or alternate possibilities within this "vagabond internationalism" (Edwards 187). Instead, the sanctions imposed on the group gradually thwart the idea of a redeeming collective identity. Michelle Stephens contends that "race and nation are ultimately resolved as noncategories . . . easily slipped into and out of" (190), but it is the enforcement of these very categories that breaks up Banjo's "orchestra" and causes severe hardship and even death.

The novel demonstrates multiple ways alternative, vagabond lifestyles are tracked, policed, and punished. What Maxwell calls "forced black Atlanticism" (45) is evident, for example, in the Nationality Doubtful stamp on Taloufa's identity papers. At a young age, Taloufa was taken from Nigeria to England by his British master, then shipped to the United States, and then deported after his involvement with Marcus Garvey's failed Black Star Line.¹⁹ McKay incorporates the entire Nationality Doubtful document in the novel and notes that it involves a fingerprint, criminal-

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izing the lack of a clear national identity. His explanation of the process by which one ends up with this status, however, departs from bureaucratic rhetoric:

Colored seamen who had lived their lives in the great careless tradition, and had lost their papers in low-down places to touts, hold-up men and passport fabricators, and were unable or too ignorant to show exact proof of their birthplace, were furnished with the new “Nationality Doubtful” papers. (269)

In contrast to the language of the document, McKay depicts those who “had lost” their nationality as victims of criminals in port cities. themselves criminalized because they were “ignorant.” To live a mobile, transient life is to be stripped of the data that would legitimate identity, and in losing papers, these men lose the rights of citizenship. Lewis notes that French immigration regulations favored stability, particularly in the form of heteronormative domesticity and established work histories. Taloufa’s participation in the “great careless tradition” of wandering confuses and thus invalidates his narrative of identity for bureaucratic purposes. With Taloufa, then, McKay restages *Banjo*’s initial self-deportation, involving a set of documentary barriers that the colonial subject cannot overcome, erected as punishment for mobility and for the assumption of political agency.

Identity-document regulations sap Lonesome Blue, another beach boy, of vitality and transform him into a part of mechanized civilization. After being caught pilfering from the docks, Lonesome, a “Southern black,” is served with a “writ of expulsion” by the French police, which means, “the order is, Get Out! And you yourself must find the way” (153). Most savvy vagabonds simply destroy the writ and change their name and location, but Lonesome fails to do this and thus is continually harassed by the police.²⁰ Tracked by authorities, he is “like an apparition, swaying strangely and mournfully in the square like a fading tree without roots in the soil . . . he was lifeless, existing mechanically because the life-giving gases still gave him sustenance” (204). Unable to move forward through life, he can only sway back and forth, an “apparition,” no longer an autonomous individual. His “swaying” also suggests the image of a lynching, linking the effects of bureaucratic imperatives on the individual with the American extralegal torture of “Southern black[s].”²¹ The consul tries to send him back to America, but he stays and is thereafter refused help, becoming “a dead thing with no spark in him” (152), rendered lifeless by state control over the human body.

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Ray initially takes Lonesome on as a cause, deploring the lack of accommodations made for black international travelers in modern bureaucracy. His efforts, though, come to naught, and he gets infuriated by Lonesome's lack of initiative and refusal to take help:

He felt that it was men like Lonesome, stupid, and utterly repulsive in their stupidity, who made petty officials the mean creatures of bureaucracy that they were. He hated with all his soul the odor of bureaucratic places, and right then he felt intensely hostile toward Lonesome as the cause of his coming in contact with them. (207)

His powerlessness in the face of official regulations clearly aggravates Ray, but he also blames Lonesome for the very essence of that bureaucracy. While the novel condemns the system of immigration and identity control, it also thus demonstrates how the victims of the system perpetuate its power. In hating with his individual "soul," moreover, Ray marks out an essential opposition between figures that exist in the channels of bureaucracy, without any inner "spark," and thinking subjects who stand apart on constitutional principle. McKay's diction here delineates a central concern of the novel: the conflict between the construction of identity from within and nationalized identity imposed from without. This latter, the novel suggests, erodes and replaces interior subjectivity, the "soul."

Ray critiques this erosion by imagining the nation as toxic and insidious:

United Snakes. The simile struck Ray's imagination, giving him a terrible vision of the stripes of Old Glory transformed into wriggling snakes and the stars poisonous heads lifted to strike at an agonized black man writhing in the midst of them. (100)

The emblems of the nation obscure all kinds of violence, racism, and exclusion under a cloak of unity.²² Rather than writing wayward subjects into a national narrative or stable social order, the novel represents how the modern system of national classification readily excludes those not willing to participate in the myths of nationality and citizenship. Despite the occasional lyricism with which he renders the cosmopolitan aspects of Marseille, McKay makes clear that the "mingled" nature of Europe frequently reveals nasty nationalisms lurking in its internationally populated spaces:

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He was grinning at the civilized world of nations, all keeping their tiger's claws sharp and strong under the thin cloak of international amity and awaiting the first favorable opportunity to spring . . . a few words would usually take him to the center of a guarded, ancient treasure of national hates. (116)

The discourse of cosmopolitan life conceals deep nationalistic prejudice that does not take much probing for Ray to discover. Not patriotic fervor but profound hostility toward other countries lies at the heart of European and American modernity. Even the mobile, bohemian expatriates who appear briefly in the novel approximate the typological function of the passport system in social life.

As a black man, over and above national identity Ray struggles with the fact that “however advanced, clever, and cultivated you are, you will have the distinguishing adjective of ‘colored’ before your name.”²³ Rather than passively accepting this categorizing gaze, however, Ray manipulates others’ impulses in order to avoid classification, wielding the illegibility of his national identity through the veil of race for his own amusement by posing as different nationalities: “he enjoyed his role of a wandering black without patriotic or family ties. He loved to pose as this or that without really being any definite thing at all” (117). Though the exclusionary logic of racial classification continually puts Ray at a disadvantage, he seizes upon his ability to appear as the subject of any number of nations, evading one category by occupying another. His charade can be read as a reformulation of both *Banjo*’s denationalizing performance and McKay’s own difficulty as a mobile colonial subject in occupying one category of national citizenship, either British or American. Ray thus rejects the principle of national identity, seeing a nation as

a swarming hive of human beings bartering, competing, exploiting, lying, cheating, battling, suppressing and killing among themselves; possessing, too, the faculty to organize their villainous rivalries into a monstrous system for plundering weaker peoples. (118)

It is not only the blind patriotism that disturbs Ray but also the internalization of a system of divisions that authorizes violence, oppression, and exclusion. In response, he tries to undermine the concept of national identity both in the way he lives his life and by managing the ways others see and classify him. By posing as British and American, Ray in effect

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stages his own process of categorization, mimicking the function of the passport and other documents and exposing its arbitrariness.²⁴

Just as rigid categories threaten individual identity, McKay warns against them as guides for responding to literary texts:

We are all floundering in a mass of race, color, national consciousness and all the correlative consciousnesses . . . We are prone to put too much stress on the identity of the characters, having an automatic reaction to them not just as people but rather as types representative of our separate divisions. And we are quick to pounce upon exaggerated types that we think were presented with bias, forgetting that bias may be in our own minds. ("A Negro to His Critics")

Contemporary readers, according to McKay, conditioned by the bureaucratic logic of modern life, misread characters through official identity categories. This logic, so prevalent in the 1920s, bleeds into the way novels are read, and he thus urges readers to practice a kind of negative capability with regard to racial and national difference. The reading public, he fears, despite pretensions to cosmopolitan outlooks and lifestyles, has internalized the classifying eye operating in modern bureaucracy.

Notes

1. For examples of this reading of the novel see chapters on *Banjo* in Edwards, Stephens, and Holcomb.
2. Banjo "insists" that he is foreign, and he is deported. Interestingly, the immigration officials with whom he comes into contact "admire" his will to choose; he "stir(s) their imagination, so long insensible to the old ways of ship desertion and stowing away" (9).
3. For Maxwell, "forced black Atlanticism" describes the process by which the imperial nation-states of primary concern to Anglophone black modernism fitfully seized the power not only to harden—and to racialize—the political boundaries surrounding their citizens but also to propel the transnational itineraries of the Afro-internationalists who escaped and opposed them. ("Global Poetics" 364)
4. For a fascinating discussion of the changing regulations about and social attitudes toward immigrants to the United States from the Caribbean, see Irma

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Watkins-Owens (11–29). She notes that the reluctance of West Indians to become naturalized led to negative feelings about their entry into the States (28); notably, Claude McKay did not become naturalized until 1940, and he did so mainly to get work (217n).

5. As I’ve observed in “‘I Am Not England,’” in its early years, the modern passport system was widely considered socially regressive and met with indignation. In *The New Age*, for example, Ezra Pound complained of the unique form of alienation produced by the document: “We are, all of us, provided with little tags and labels; each time we move we get a new set of luggage cheques . . . let us have one photo printed on the right shoulder” (Pound 107).

6. McKay describes his time in Russia, working more with Russian communists than the American organization, in *A Long Way from Home*. His book *Negroes in America* was published in Russian translation in 1923. Wayne Cooper gives a detailed account of McKay’s activities in this period.

7. In *A Long Way from Home* McKay writes that Joyce “incomparably and legitimately was *le maître* among the moderns. . . . Ulysses was . . . a textbook for modern writers,” and Lawrence was “the modern writer I preferred above any” (247).

8. This depiction of black life, however, had severe political effects. As Gary Holcomb notes:

black critics did not pounce on the novel for being politically treasonable; they attacked it for being culturally seditious, as McKay, a known black author, had composed yet another novel that perpetuated crude stereotypes of black folks. (146)

To belong fully to the canon of the New Negro, art, it was argued, should uplift the race, not degrade it, as McKay was accused of doing. W. E. B. Dubois praised the novel over *Home to Harlem* but expressed dissatisfaction with its formlessness and its focus on the lower depths of life in Marseille (qtd. in Tillery 108).

9. *Home to Harlem* and *Banana Bottom*, McKay’s other two novels, follow more traditional developmental plots. Both are focalized through a single protagonist (though Ray does figure in Jake’s experiences in *Home to Harlem*) and recount a period of major change in the main character’s life.

10. In *Home to Harlem* Ray reflects on contemporary events in Haiti while serving as a waiter on a train in the US, though he first tells Jake of the “strange, almost unimaginable eruption of the beautiful ideas” of the French Revolution that motivated Haiti’s independence under Toussaint L’Ouverture

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(156). Later, as he drifts to sleep, he thinks, "as he was conscious of being black and impotent, so, correspondingly, each marine down in Hayti must be conscious of feeling white and powerful" (165). The occupation of Haiti by the US that began in 1915 ruined his sense of himself as "the son of a free nation."

11. In the wake of World War I, moreover, France became the "world's leading immigrant-receiving nation" (Clifford Rosenberg xiii). Marseille was the biggest port in the country and had more foreigners entering it than any other port in the world.

12. Following World War I, France set about a massive project of repatriation to rid itself of the North African subjects who had served in the French military; their identity "was . . . 'perverted, gutted' of the rights to which a French national could ordinarily lay claim" (Lewis 188). Marseille served as the clearinghouse for this project of exportation, and police practices were tailored to control suspect populations.

13. Banjo prefers to forgo the act of payment in favor of direct trade; he thinks, "Sous! How could he respect sous? He who had burnt up dollars. Why should he care, with a free bed, free love, and wine?" (39). For an interesting reading of musical tropes in the novel, see Tom Lutz.

14. The Ditch (La Fosse), the locale of most of the novel, was the part of the city to which black subjects and illegal residents were unofficially designated. As Edwards points out (189), that La Fosse was destroyed by the Germans in World War II makes *Banjo's* detailed evocation of it especially valuable.

15. Banjo's crew refuses money, survives on the waste of others, and operates on an assumption of shared benefits: any "take" by one of the men is shared with the whole group.

16. Stephens uses this term to describe Banjo's act of self-deportation (181).

17. One of Lewis's central points in her account of migrant rights in France between the wars is that "instead of continuing to favor the temporary residency of single male migrants, authorities . . . gave special privileges to immigrants who had established families in France" (3). Immigration regulations and enforcement in the 1920s and 30s in Marseille focused on transient men who did not enter into stable domestic situations that produced children, which the government considered beneficial to the French state.

18. Ray is a Haitian national who has traveled through Europe and whose presumable first language is French; this has made his position "as a black boy looking on the civilized scene . . . a unique one" (117).

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19. The story of Taloufa bears some resemblance to the case of a young West African man McKay met in Marseille while conceptualizing *Banjo*. McKay wrote in 1928 to the director of La Compagnie Fabre to ask for the release of the young man, who had been deported from New York after stowing away and “having his feet frozen in the place where he was locked up” (Letter to Director). He was “returned to Marseille to be sent home to Africa . . . but was arrested for . . . clandestine embarkation. . . . I should like to write a happy story,” McKay writes, “but I could only do that if the boy is speedily and unconditionally released.” McKay attempts to use the potential for cultural representation as leverage to affect the legal status of an imprisoned black man, suggesting that his motivation in writing *Banjo* in the form he does is both political and literary.

20. Despite the high number of deportation orders in France (95,130 between 1920 and 1933), Rosenberg notes that “only a fraction of deportation notices ever led to an immigrant’s leaving the country” (92–93). Many were able to elude the orders, which were difficult to enforce.

21. I want to thank *Twentieth-Century Literature*’s anonymous reader for pointing me to this rhetorical continuity.

22. For Ray, a Haitian national, Stephens writes, the “principle of nationhood and status of citizenship become even more corrupted and deformed by their historical inheritances of the racial legacies of colonialism” (156).

23. Though Ray socializes with cosmopolitan whites, he is by no means a member of that group, as Celena Kusch notes:

Within modernism, cultural hybridity, international travel, global interests, and an ability to speak many languages do in part signify modernist cosmopolites, but in early twentieth century parlance, racial or colonial others who demonstrate the same abilities do not qualify as cosmopolitan. (45)

For a detailed discussion of American blacks in early twentieth-century Paris, see Ch. Didier Gondola.

24. Ray never poses as French, most likely because of his Haitian background and the treatment of North African French subjects in the metropole. Gondola points out that “the presence of black Americans in France allowed the French, especially the liberal fringes of society, to have a vicarious, ‘sanitized’ African experience . . . without that uncomfortable intimacy” of colonial subjects (205).

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Gerty MacDowell, Poetess:

Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey*
and the Nausicaa Episode of *Ulysses*

Timo Müller

A few hours before Bloom meets his Nausicaa on Sandymount beach, Stephen meets his Scylla and Charybdis in the Irish National Library. The Dublin intelligentsia have convened to discuss art and artists, in particular Shakespeare, and there seems to be a general agreement that a work of art should be approached by way of its author's biography. When Stephen has expounded his theory that Shakespeare is to be equated with Hamlet's father, the talk turns to other recent scholarship in that vein:

The most brilliant of all is that story of Wilde's, Mr Best said, lifting his brilliant notebook. That *Portrait of Mr. W. H.* where he proves that the sonnets were written by a Willie Hughes, a man all hues. . . . It's the very essence of Wilde, don't you know. The light touch. (9.522-30)

Wilde's short story, which suggests that the sonnets were written for (not by) a Willie Hughes, was published in 1889, adding to a controversy more than a century old. As early as 1766, Thomas Tyrwhitt had argued that "Mr. W. H.," according to Shakespeare's dedication the "onlie begetter" of his sonnets, was a young actor named Willie Hughes. There was virtually no historical evidence to support this hypothesis; its proponents mainly relied on the line from sonnet 20, "A man in hue all hues in his controlling," and on the recurrent puns on the name Will, which, of course, might just as well refer to the author himself. For the informed scholar of 1904, however, Wilde's would not have been the most recent contri-

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bution to the debate. Only five years before, in 1899, Samuel Butler had published *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*, where he took up Tyrwhitt's hypothesis to argue that if read in the "proper" sequence, the sonnets yield further information about the background and character of Mr. Hughes. The addressee, he claimed, was a young man of modest standing, good-looking and popular but vain and heartless; in consequence, "his character developed badly, and . . . before the end of the year he had got himself a bad name" (137). Given the discussion that precedes Mr. Best's remark, it is reasonable to assume that his mistaken attribution of authorship to Willie Hughes is not an error on Joyce's part but another allusion to the theme, recurrent in *Ulysses*, of covert self-portraiture. The same, I believe, applies to the indirect reference to Butler, which acquires unexpected significance at a later point in the novel.

The works of Samuel Butler have often been identified as a probable influence on Joyce. Until recently, scholars focused on *The Way of All Flesh* as a precursor to the Joyce canon, and especially to that other bildungsroman on the verge of modernism, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.¹ New inquiries were incited when the list of books in Joyce's Trieste library was published in Richard Ellmann's *The Consciousness of Joyce* (1977). Besides *The Way of All Flesh*, the list includes four other works by Butler: *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*, *Erewhon*, *The Humor of Homer*, and *The Authoress of the Odyssey*. As its title suggests, it is the last of these books that can be read most profitably against Joyce's works, especially *Ulysses*. A scholarly study published in 1897, *The Authoress* argues that the Homeric *Odyssey* was actually written by a Sicilian girl who portrayed herself in the figure of Nausicaa. The book met with critical reservations on its appearance but soon achieved a certain notoriety among students of the Homeric poems. Joyce was among these students, and since *The Authoress* was on his bookshelf at the time, it is reasonable to assume that he had Butler's hypothesis in mind when he wrote the Nausicaa episode of *Ulysses* in 1919–20.²

Critics have occasionally speculated about the influence Butler's study might have had on Joyce's conception of *Ulysses*. Hugh Kenner, who first drew attention to specific intertextual links, sees a parallel between the description of Telemachus's tower in *The Authoress* and the Martello Tower where *Ulysses* opens ("Homer's Sticks and Stones" 293). Ellmann suggests that Gerty's inept attempts at sentimental poetry are an ironic comment on Butler's celebration of his woman authoress, and that the

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idea of a woman author of such fame might have encouraged Joyce to give Gerty and Molly more prominent roles in the book (*Ulysses on the Liffey* 130; "Joyce and Homer" 572). Michael Seidel sees Butler's influence on a more general plane: he argues that in treating the *Odyssey* "as if it were a novel" and in condensing the space of its narrative to the environs of his hypothetical Nausicaa's hometown, Butler provided two fundamental transformative impulses for Joyce's own reworking of the Homeric text (84). David Wright names five aspects of the novel that might have been influenced by Butler: Joyce's "iconoclastic manner of approaching" Homer's text; his transformation of the *Odyssey* into a more personal, at times even autobiographical story; his use of a different setting; his greater interest in women characters, especially Molly/Penelope; and his technique of telling the story from the characters' perspectives rather than a Homeric epic narrator's (112–14).

Altogether, there have been only sporadic comments on the *Authoress* intertext in Joyce criticism, and no detailed comparison has been undertaken. This is unfortunate because, as I will argue, Joyce drew on *The Authoress* to a much greater extent than has been suspected. He may be indebted to Butler for the general outline of *Ulysses*, but there is no conclusive evidence that the aspects that have been cited—transposition to a different setting, emphasis on different characters, different narrative perspective, etc.—were actually inspired by *The Authoress*. Sustained parallels between the two books are to be found elsewhere. Hugh Kenner points in the right direction when he speculates that the narrator of Joyce's Nausicaa episode might be modeled on Butler's hypothetical authoress (*Ulysses* 104f). He is correct in assuming that the strongest influence Butler's book could provide was on characterization: Butler himself had been inspired by his interest in the personality of the Homeric narrator, and his richly imaginative portrayal of Nausicaa-the-authoress is the indubitable strength of his book. On the whole, however, Joyce's benevolent Victorian narrator has too little in common with Butler's practical, headstrong girl to bear out Kenner's assumption. The character we need to take a closer look at is the heroine of the episode herself, Gerty MacDowell. Joyce's characterization of Gerty, I contend, relies on Butler's account of Nausicaa much more than it relies on the Homeric original. Starting from a textual comparison of the three versions, I will show that Gerty shares with Butler's Nausicaa an ambivalent attitude toward wealth and sumptuousness, a somewhat hypocritical notion of moral behavior, a profound respect

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for religious proprieties, and a marked proclivity for self-fashioning. The suggestion implicit in these parallels—that Gerty can be thought of as the covert authoress of her episode—will reveal how Joyce uses her to represent or problematize crucial aspects of his own approach to writing.

As Margaret Mills Harper has noted, Butler's claim that the author of the *Odyssey* is a woman partly relies on essentialist notions of gender (181). The "indications" he collects include the authoress's attendance to matters of housework, cleanliness, and dress, her sanctification of married life, and her fierceness toward disloyal or disgraceful women. Where these criteria prove too broad, Butler resorts to his imagination to specify the authoress's personality and social background. He pictures her as a "young, headstrong, and unmarried" (*Authoress* 149) woman of comparatively high standing and ambition in marriage. "The poem," he asserts, "is such a *tour de force* as none but a high-spirited, headstrong girl who had been accustomed to have her own way would have attempted" (150). This profile, in combination with his notion that the settings of the *Odyssey* are modeled on corresponding areas of Sicily, leads Butler to assume that the authoress portrayed herself in the figure of Nausicaa. In the *Odyssey* Nausicaa's appearance is limited to book 6, which opens with Ulysses asleep on a Phaeacian beach after his shipwreck. Minerva (Pallas Athena) wants to introduce him to the king and decides to send the king's daughter, Nausicaa, to wash garments at the beach with her maids. When their work is done, the maids play ball while Nausicaa sings to them. Minerva eventually makes Nausicaa throw the ball into a whirlpool, whereupon the maids shriek and Ulysses, who has been sleeping in a nearby wood, awakes. The maids are panic-stricken and flee, but Nausicaa stands her ground, and Ulysses begs her to help him. She accedes, orders her maids to wash and clothe him, and advises him on how best to approach her father.

While Joyce's Nausicaa episode adopts some elements of the Homeric plot—the girls play on the beach, the ball becomes a device for attracting attention, they are observed by Bloom—the deviations are more numerous than the parallels. A comparison of the two versions is instructive in our context because it yields several passages where Joyce draws on Butler's account of the *Odyssey* rather than on the original text. More specifically, he seems to follow Butler's synopses of the incidents rather than the complete translation of the *Odyssey* he had on his bookshelf.³ I want to draw attention to two passages in particular. The first of these

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relates Nausicaa's feelings for Ulysses when she sees him in full splendor for the first time, after the stranded hero has washed and dressed himself. In Cowper's translation, the passage reads as follows:

At first I deem'd him of plebeian sort
Dishonourable, but he now assumes
A near resemblance to the Gods above.
Ah! would to heaven it were my lot to call
Husband, some native of our land like him
Accomplish'd, and content to inhabit here! (6: 300–05)

Nausicaa is clearly attracted to Ulysses but, in a surprising twist, implies that she cannot marry a foreigner. She prefers "some native of our land" who looks like her newfound idol. Her reaction is different from Gerty's, who recognizes Bloom as a foreigner "at once" (466) but plans to marry him and no one else. Gerty too wants a husband who shares her cultural background, but she is confident that the hero himself will be malleable enough: "Even if he was a protestant or methodist she could convert him easily if he truly loved her." It is intriguing to imagine how she would react if she learned that Bloom was Jewish,⁴ but the significance of the passage for my argument lies in the observation that Gerty is closer to Butler's Nausicaa than to Homer's. For in Butler's synopsis, Nausicaa's reaction is: "At first . . . I thought him quite plain, but now he is of god-like beauty. I wish I might have such a man as that for my husband, if he would only stay here" (34). The end of the sentence leaves little doubt that this Nausicaa, like Gerty, desires the man who is standing in front of her and no other.

Nausicaa then advises Ulysses not to follow her into town on her cart because people might take offense at the accompaniment and question her virtue. Indeed, she says in Cowper's translation,

I should blame
A virgin guilty of such conduct much,
Myself, who reckless of her parents' will,
Should so familiar with a man consort,
Ere celebration of her spousal rites. (304–08)

This firm, unequivocal code of conduct is altered slightly but decisively in Butler's synopsis, where she says: "I should be scandalized myself if I saw any girl going about with a stranger, while her father and mother were

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yet alive, without being married to him in the face of all the world" (35). Butler's Nausicaa is concerned not so much with an ethical code as with keeping up appearances. She disapproves not of the action itself (going about with a stranger) but of the scandal it might cause; not of disobeying her elders but of doing it while they are still alive to witness it; not of being "familiar" with a man but of showing it "in the face of all the world." In this she is very much like Gerty, who, as we will see shortly, is quick to moralize and condemn but ultimately cares less for principles than for appearances. The attitude Butler's Nausicaa shows in this scene is best expressed in her fear of scandal, which replaces the fear of "blame" we find in Cowper's translation. Hers is a societal norm, not an ethical one.

Quite apart from questions of phrasing, a comparative reading shows that Joyce's general characterization of Gerty draws on Butler's account of Nausicaa much more than Homer's. Homer describes her as divine, widely admired, and "in form / And feature perfect as the Gods" (20–21), but little is said about her personality; from her behavior we can infer that she is rather smart and practical. Gerty, in comparison, possesses none of these qualities; given the Homeric description, she seems to be a negative of Nausicaa rather than her equivalent. If we compare her to Butler's Nausicaa, however, we get a very different picture. The striking difference is, of course, made possible by Butler's assumption that Nausicaa is the author, which allows him to base his characterization not only on the scene where Nausicaa actually appears but on the entire poem and on what he identifies as its underlying attitudes. In fact, I would argue that the defining traits of Butler's Nausicaa are all reflected in Joyce's characterization of Gerty MacDowell.

For one thing, Butler's Nausicaa is torn between her highly developed sense of fashion and her "instinctive thrift" (146). She is fond of imagining sumptuous feasts and wealthy households but does not ultimately approve of such splendor. In her poetry, sensibility and thrift are the marks of a reliable character who deserves our sympathy. What her occasional flights of fancy do show, however, is her acquaintance with and guilty admiration of the very rich and fashionable, excluded though she is from their world. This ambivalence is characteristic of Gerty's attitude as well. An avid reader of women's magazines and sentimental romances, Gerty admires the world of high society, which she tries to imitate by using the "eyebrowline . . . so becoming in leaders of fashion" (453). Her favorite magazine is called the "Princess novelette," which aptly indicates the so-

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cial sphere to which she aspires. From this world she adopts the ideals of dignity, reserve, and fanciness in speech, which however she cannot quite sustain in her dismal petit-bourgeois world. Prevented by her humble origins from realizing her ambitions of social ascent, she resorts to her imagination, picturing a world where she is a widely admired success. Despite the similarity between Gerty's compensatory strategy and that of Butler's Nausicaa (I am tempted to read the "Princess novelette" as another allusion to Butler's hypothesis that Nausicaa made herself a princess in her fiction) there is no doubt that Gerty ultimately falls short of her Sicilian counterpart. If Nausicaa did write the *Odyssey*, her own appearance in it played a minor role in the overall conception of the work. Even though her poetry is imitative of Homer's *Iliad*, as Gerty's "fictional" daydreaming is imitative of the Victorian sentimental novel, Nausicaa-the-authoress did produce a great work of literature in the end. Gerty, in contrast, achieves nothing original or even remotely interesting, but tellingly pictures herself as the brilliant heroine of whatever sugary dime romance she has in mind. Far from elevating Gerty to mythical stature, the comparison with Nausicaa in effect exposes her vanity and mediocrity.

As I have indicated above, however, Butler's Nausicaa is by no means above criticism, and in many respects Gerty is modeled on her without ironic distance. For instance, the two figures share a strict but somewhat hypocritical notion of moral behavior. Butler repeatedly emphasizes Nausicaa's concern for female purity, which finds its principal expression in her denigration of the suitors and her somewhat improbable portrayal of Penelope as unwaveringly abstemious and loyal to her husband. The authoress's concern with "the honour of her sex," Butler explains, makes her "by consequence inexorable in her severity against those women who have disgraced it" (120), such as the housemaids who slept with the suitors. He points out her particular fierceness toward female "sinners": not content with having Ulysses kill the housemaids, she makes them wipe up the blood of their dead lovers first (124). Gerty's attitude toward her girlfriends is similarly harsh and censoring. Even though she flirts with Bloom herself, she indicts Cissy for showing off her legs ("the cheek of her!") and maliciously hopes for immediate punishment: "It would have served her just right if she had tripped up over something accidentally on purpose with her high crooked French heels" (468). Though Gerty's lameness might explain her anger here, on the whole one cannot help but suspect that both she and Butler's Nausicaa are simply jealous of women

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who are more successful than they are with men, especially because both girls fail to maintain their attitude of disinterested chastity when their own love interests come into play. (Gerty too will show off her leg to Bloom a few minutes later.) In this context Butler points out that his authoress seems to adore Telemachus, whom she idealizes by highlighting his steadfastness, obedience, and seriousness—in short, “the unobtrusive but exemplary manner in which he discharges all his religious, moral, and social duties” (125). Gerty’s sweetheart is called Reggie Wylie, short for Reginald—a Teutonic name referring to the prince’s counselor or the prince himself, which makes him not only a fitting counterpart for the princess Gerty would like to be but also, probably, another allusion to Butler’s poetic princess and her Telemachus. Though Reggie seems anything but interested in her, Gerty pictures their “romance” as a dramatic story of love, betrayal, and heartbreak. Lastly, the two girls share a vague awareness that their moralistic severity has made them rather unpopular among their peers, a development they thematize in their “fiction.” Nausicaa puts into her own mouth the complaint about the “bitter taunts” (338) and “injurious” (354) talk about her that she suspects to be passing among the Phaeacians; Gerty approaches the issue with characteristic indirectness: she thinks that when she is finally married, the other girls “could talk about her till they went blue in the face . . . because she would be twenty-two in November” (457). The inversion is revealing: whereas Nausicaa is talked about by men because she won’t choose a husband, Gerty is talked about by women because she can’t find one.

Another, related parallel between the two girls is their observance of religious proprieties. In his discussion of the episode in book 17 where Eumaeus explains what kind of foreigner is most likely to be invited to a house, Butler emphasizes that Nausicaa-the-authoress puts a “divine” first in the herdsman’s list, followed by a doctor, a carpenter, and a bard (159). Her preference for clergymen, whom she thinks of as seers, is reflected in Gerty’s awed adoration of Father Conroy, the priest to whom she makes her confession. Generally, Butler characterizes his Nausicaa as a pious believer who insists with “punctiliousness” on “small religious observances” and shows great “respect for gods and omens, and for the *convenances* generally” throughout her poem (125). Given Nausicaa’s moral hypocrisy, however, her respect for the *convenances* suggests a somewhat ambivalent religiosity, one that focuses on following the established rules and conventions rather than the ethical principles they express. Again,

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we find a similar predisposition in Gerty, who is a regular churchgoer but seems more interested in the priests than in God. Like Nausicaa, she follows the rules because it is expected of her, even though she does not seem to agree with the underlying principles: she will not have sex before marriage because she would not receive absolution for it; similarly, she goes to confession but would prefer to go through the exercise without “telling out” her sins (476). As an aside, there is a trace of the Homeric theme in the very epitome of Irish Catholicism in the episode, namely the church near the beach where a service is being held. This church, which introduces the theme of religion and engenders Gerty’s reflections on Bloom and Catholicism, is called “Star of the Seas” for the Virgin Mary. In our context, however, the name might also be taken to connote Nausicaa, guide of seafaring Ulysses and, in Butler’s version of things, authoress of the greatest sea epic of all time. Gerty’s guiding function might be more important to Joyce than readers of the novel usually imagine: she might be one of the seers whom Nausicaa-the-authoress puts first in the list of useful persons; at least we should take the hint that she is not a sideshow freak but a figure of some importance in the general scheme of the novel.

A last character trait that Gerty shares with Butler’s Nausicaa, and one that points to her importance in *Ulysses*, is her proclivity for self-fashioning. I have noted that both girls are concerned with appearances rather than principles. Nausicaa-the-authoress, however, admires steadfastness and constancy in others and presumably would like to achieve these virtues herself, so her poetry only adumbrates the performative notion of self that dominates Gerty’s thoughts and behavior. One such hint in the *Odyssey* is Minerva’s speech to Telemachus in book 15:

For well thou know’st how woman is disposed;
Her whole anxiety is to encrease
His substance whom she weds; no care hath she
Of her first children, or remembers more
The buried husband of her virgin choice. (26–30)

While this might be a piece of unconscious self-analysis on the authoress’s part—she is quick to leave her previous admirers behind when she spots good-looking Ulysses on the beach—it is definitely a fitting description of Gerty’s behavior. Reggie Wylie, for all the melodramatic longing she affects in the beginning of her section, disappears from her thoughts the instant she sees Bloom and begins to picture herself as a pure, untouched

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woman waiting for the stranger. This image might derive from Butler's characterization of Nausicaa, who is so "bent on purifying the age" (150) as to maintain, against all probability and contrary to previous accounts of the story, that Penelope "from first to last . . . had been pure as new fallen snow" (265). Gerty appears similarly unrealistic in her insistence on the idealized Victorian image of marriage as a blissful partnership of a caring husband and a pure, self-sacrificing wife, for Gerty's own family is as far as can be imagined from attaining this ideal: her father is a drunkard who beats his wife and possibly his daughter too. Barred as she is from the pleasures of real-life wealth, harmony, and lovemaking, she resorts to the fictional mode of mental self-fashioning as a substitute. This is more than mere escapism, however. Self-fashioning is traditionally the domain of the artist, and indeed, Gerty's self-fashioning has an imaginative quality to it. Not only does she think of herself as a writer of poetry, she also reveals a certain imaginative range in selecting and embroidering fantasy roles for herself. Her favorite role is as a princess, which links her with Butler's Nausicaa, that greatest of all pretenders to societal and literary elevation. If Joyce did model her on the Greek authoress, the Gerty/Nausicaa parallel acquires an aspect of authorial self-fashioning as far-reaching as the Stephen/Hamlet parallel: by means of his fictional representatives, Joyce fashions himself as the modern Homer no less consistently than he fashions himself as the modern Shakespeare.

Joyce's fiction is particularly attuned to strategies of literary self-fashioning: most of its major characters are versions of the author in one way or another. In *Ulysses* we have not only Stephen Dedalus, the obvious Joycean representative, but also Leopold Bloom, who in Lenehan's phrase has "a touch of the artist" (302) about him (see Schutte for a detailed discussion), and Molly, who in traditional readings of the novel represents the feminine principle in a trinity of authorial figures. What traditional readings tend to disregard is the substantial number of minor artist figures in the novel, including Malachi Mulligan, the novel's inaugural performer, whose (self-fashioned?) first name means "my messenger"; Simon Dedalus, the great artificer in the realm of music; A. E. and his would-be Parnassians at the National Library; and last but not least, Gerty MacDowell, the unacknowledged authoress of her very own *Sweets of Sin*, who handles the suggestive so artfully as to produce in Bloom with minimal means the most sensual of all reader responses. Arguably, all of these figures have at least equal claims to artisthood as Bloom or Molly;

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most of them surpass even Stephen when it comes to public approbation. (In a rather literal sense, this applies even to Gerty: compare Bloom's response to her performance with the responses Stephen's impotent love lyrics receive at the Clerys's breakfast table in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.) Gerty's artistic talent should not be overstated, but I do think one of her functions in the novel is to embody and problematize via her artistic pretensions some crucial aspects of Joyce's writing.

Gerty's greatest artistic quality is her ability to see herself from the outside—that is, to analyze the image others have of her and change it accordingly. This is not an occasional effort but a habit she has internalized to the degree that it works even in private. We are told that “she would give worlds to be in the privacy of her own familiar chamber where, giving way to tears, she could have a good cry and relieve her pentup feelings. Though not too much because she knew how to cry nicely before the mirror” (456). The very “giving way to tears” becomes a performance here, and the mirror represents the eye of the other whose inferred judgment determines the performance. Here many readers see voluntary reification in a society dominated by the male gaze (Devlin; Leonard; Johnson 899–900); but Gerty's capacity to see herself through the eye of the other is a potentially empowering force that distinguishes her from more self-contained figures such as Haines, Simon Dedalus, the Citizen, and Molly. In fact, the autobiographical impetus underlying all of Joyce's fiction relies on this very pattern: from the coldly scientific analyses of failed artists in *Dubliners* to the complex self/other relationships of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce analyzes incomplete versions of himself in order to optimize his own artistic development. In most episodes of *Ulysses* the artistic mode of this project is a ruthless naturalism. His well-known creed, “he is a very bold man to alter . . . whatever he has seen and heard” (*Letters* 134), roots him in a tradition that starts with Homer—interestingly, Butler says of his authoress that she is “a writer to whom invention does not come easily, and who is not likely to have recourse to it more than she can help” (214)—and contrasts sharply with the popular mode of sentimental melodrama that dominated the literature of his day. Joyce's characterization of Gerty as a sentimentalist is his most decisive departure from Butler's argument. Where Homer and Joyce stick to the facts, Gerty uses her imagination. “During the long monologue focused through her eyes,” John M. Warner writes, “we see Gerty consistently converting empirical reality, the ‘facts’ of her history, into the stuff of romance, the myth

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of herself that she lives by" (26). She converts her lameness into elegant passivity; Reggie Wylie's indifference into a dramatic story of love and betrayal; Bloom's masturbation into a meeting of pure souls. The point is, of course, that Gerty's "fiction" derives in a Coleridgean sense not from imagination but from mere fancy: it is no more than a series of clichés prefabricated in the literary mass market of her day. Her "artistry" thus serves to accentuate the tension between the realist and the sentimentalist modes, and, in a second step, to justify Joyce's radical dismissal of the latter.

Most critical judgments of Gerty, including some of mine so far, have relied on one of two basic assumptions. The first is that the Gerty section of Joyce's Nausicaa episode is free indirect discourse—which it is not. While some passages in it can be read in this way, they are sparse, and never sustained for more than a few sentences. The narrative voice is distinguished from Gerty through its sophisticated vocabulary, its knowledge of events Gerty cannot see (such as the incident involving the candle flames in the church), and its point of view.⁵ This is not a simple-minded girl's discourse but the sentimentalized third-person narration of a Victorian omniscient narrator. The second assumption, tacitly adopted by many of those critics who recognize the difference between Gerty and the narrator, is that the narrator nevertheless speaks "for" her: that his discourse is determined by her fantasies, values, and desires. The narrator that these critics posit is an idealization, an imaginative transformation of a bland girl into an experienced, eloquent lady novelist. This notion relies on an ultimately circular logic: it extracts putative character traits from the impersonal narrative voice, matches them with a figure in the story, and concludes that this figure is somehow the narrator. This, of course, is exactly what Butler does in *The Authoress of the Odyssey*. He ascribes to the epic narrator's voice traits like cleanliness, femininity, youth; when he finds the same traits in the figure of Nausicaa he casts this rather bland character as the author of the entire epic. What Butler's conclusions imply is that not even a writer of Homeric stature can prevent his personal preferences and opinions from seeping into his works. Ultimately, I would argue that it is this denial of the writer's control over his narrative voice that Joyce is satirizing in his Nausicaa episode. More than anything else, "Nausicaa" is a masterpiece of narrative control. It juggles different modes, styles, and perspectives to create a complex portrait of male-female relations in turn-of-the-century Ireland. It achieves this scope by exploring several points of view, by empathizing with its characters but never fully identi-

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fyng with any one of them. In Joyce's view, the truly great writers, from Homer to himself, all maintain this reflexive distance between themselves and their fictional world, standing back, watching their characters with a sharp eye, and judging what can be learned from their very follies and shortcomings.

Notes

1. The parallels were first pointed out by W.Y. Tindall and Richard Ellmann (*James Joyce* 153n.); they were elaborated in the in-depth comparisons conducted by Ilse Dusoier Lind and William T. Noon. E. L. Epstein has found occasional references to Butler's novel in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as well. Epstein's comparison of *The Way* and *Ulysses* focuses on the library scene, with its father-son theme. He mentions that Joyce owned a copy of *The Authoress* but does not follow this up (22).
2. On the date of composition, see Litz 144. The Trieste library list dates from that period, and Stanislaus Joyce confirmed that his brother had read *The Authoress* (qtd. in Stanford 276n6).
3. The translation was Cowper's. Hugh Kenner has pointed out that Joyce, like all his educated contemporaries, had read Homer in several different translations, including in all likelihood those by Pope, Chapman, Cowper, and Butcher and Lang, as well as the prose translation that Butler published to accompany *The Authoress* ("Homer's Sticks and Stones" 285, 288, 295, 296). We can rule out the pathos-laden Butcher and Lang translation as a serious source; Kenner rightly comments that it "was already out of date when it was issued" and could be little more than "material for parody" to Joyce (288). Butler's own translation dovetails with his Nausicaa study in its idiosyncratic rendering of the story; of all the versions mentioned by Kenner, it is furthest from the Homer that Joyce's contemporaries would have had in mind. Of the three remaining translations, all of which may serve to represent the "standard" Homer on which Joyce played his variations, I use Cowper's because, as I noted above, it was on Joyce's bookshelf in 1919–20 (Ellmann, *Consciousness* 122) and because Stanislaus Joyce named it as his brother's source.
4. Despite Bloom's comment in the Eumaeus episode (745) and the strong conviction expressed by critics such as Steinberg, I follow Joyce and most Joyceans in thinking of Bloom as Jewish. The scene at Barney Kiernan's and Bloom's constant rumination on Jewish customs and expressions strongly suggest a Jewish background. Even if he were not Jewish, however, Gerty would still believe the widespread and firm opinion among Dubliners that he is.

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5. The assumption that Gerty's section is free indirect discourse is surprisingly widespread. See for example Lawrence 123 and Johnson 899. In contrast, Marilyn French rightly states that the "narrator is detached from and above . . . Gerty, the church service, and Bloom" (157). As regards Gerty, the narrator's superior perspective is best exemplified in the much-quoted passage starting "Gerty MacDowell who was seated near her companions . . . was in very truth as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see" (452).

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Reviews

War's Lives, Lies, and Legacies

Survivors' Songs: From Maldon to the Somme

By Jon Stallworthy

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 226 pages

Guy Cuthbertson

War and the literature of war have long been at the heart of Jon Stallworthy's writing. He recalls: "perhaps because I began writing poems (at the age of seven) in wartime, I associated poets with war-correspondents, their cameras at the ready to record other people's moments of crisis" (*Poetry Matters*). Born in 1935, he was too young to serve in the Second World War, but before he went up to Oxford University to read English he was appointed second lieutenant in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and seconded to the Royal West African Frontier Force. He explains: "I thought this had a gratifyingly Kiplingesque ring to it but, with the imminent approach of my last summer term, didn't have time to open an atlas and find out what frontiers there were to enforce" (*Singing School* 110). He has written poems called "War Story," "War Poet," "Last Post," "War Song of the Embattled Finns," and "A poem About Poems About Vietnam." He became the first biographer of Wilfred Owen in 1974 and edited Owen's *Complete Poems and Fragments*, which was published in 1983, the year before his *Oxford Book of War Poetry*. His 2002 exhibition "Anthem for Doomed Youth" at the Imperial War Museum drew 32,000 visitors. *Survivors' Songs: From Maldon to the Somme*, a collection of essays about the literature of war, is another sensitive and significant contribution by Stallworthy to our understanding of war and war writers, and it is a fair reflection of his fine career.

In his poem "No Ordinary Sunday," Stallworthy recalls Remembrance Sunday at school—"low voiced, the headmaster called the roll / of those who could not answer" (*Rounding the Horn* 31)—and school, recurring through the essays, is one of the subjects of *Survivors' Songs*. This book covers some of the ground that is covered by Peter Parker's excellent book

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The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos (1987). The first essay, "The Death of the Hero," was the introduction to *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, and in it Stallworthy argues that the ethos of the public (that is, private) schools was "essentially chivalric" (8). He discusses the impact that these schools had on the perception of war, especially in 1914 and 1915, noting that "most of the British poets we associate with the years 1914 and 1915 had a public-school education and this, more than any other factor, distinguishes them from those we associate with the later phases of the war" (10–11). The Victorian schools encouraged the belief that war is a game and the battlefield a playing field, but "the legacy of the public-school classroom was as significant for the poets as that of the playing-field":

Paul Fussell rightly points out in his stimulating book, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, that the British soldier tended to look at the war through literary spectacles. He evidences the popularity of Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*, but surprisingly overlooks the extent to which the public-school poets' attitude to war was conditioned by their years of immersion in the works of Caesar, Virgil, Horace, and Homer. (11–12)

Fussell's influence on writing about the First World War, both literary criticism and fiction, has been immense since the publication of *The Great War and Modern Memory* in 1975, possibly even greater than the influence of Stallworthy's *Wilfred Owen: A Biography*, which was published the year before, but Stallworthy is able to see some weaknesses in Fussell's book. Discussing David Jones in the essay "Survivors' Songs," Stallworthy disagrees with Fussell's opinion and interpretation of *In Parenthesis*, and in the essay "Christ and the Soldier" he amends Fussell's description of Siegfried Sassoon. Nonetheless, *Survivors' Songs* never seeks to pick arguments or sink into academic backbiting. The book has been written with gentleness and friendliness.

Friendship is central to the fourth essay, "Who Was Rupert Brooke?" in which Stallworthy argues that Brooke is "a poet of peace, a celebrant of friendship, love, and laughter" (54). The essay begins by discussing Geoffrey Keynes, the editor of Brooke's letters and "the poet's oldest friend" (42). Keynes was also Stallworthy's friend, hence in Stallworthy's *Rounding the Horn* the two poems about Keynes, "For Margaret and Geoffrey Keynes" and "In Memory of Geoffrey Keynes KT late of Lammas House," and it is also clear in "Who Was Rupert Brooke?" that Stallworthy has

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a great deal of affection for Brooke, who has become rather unpopular in schools and universities. "Geoffrey and Margaret Keynes used to say how funny he was, and in a letter of 1905 Rupert asks Geoffrey, 'Have I not often made you laugh?'" (43), so Stallworthy argues that Brooke, as a man and a poet, is a great admirer of laughter. The essay ends with Brooke's best-known poem, "The Soldier," which associates England with "laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness" (54).

Brooke and Stallworthy went to the same school, Rugby School, which was central to the Victorian revitalization of the public-school system and the creation of the chivalric ethos that was carried into the First World War. Some of its buildings were designed by William Butterfield in bright red brick, and Stallworthy writes: "it is hard not to warm to the Rugby schoolboy who, suffering from pink-eye, explains that 'The disease comes of gazing too often on Butterfield's architecture'" (44). Rugby School is also discussed in "The Death of the Hero," where it is the school of Thomas Arnold, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and Matthew Arnold's "Rugby Chapel." In his portrait of his own apprentice years, *Singing School*, Stallworthy recalls that when he found in Rugby Chapel the memorials to Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, Walter Savage Landor, and Rupert Brooke, he "began to feel better about Rugby" (71). *Singing School* refers several times to Brooke, whose memorial is one of the illustrations, and Stallworthy admits that "for better or (many will think) for worse, Rupert Brooke had a high place in my schoolboy pantheon" (109). This portrait of his apprentice years also features Geoffrey Keynes, whom Stallworthy first met in 1950, when the "Distinguished Old Rugbeian" gave a talk at the school (79).

Indeed, *Singing School* would serve as a good companion to *Survivors' Songs*, because of the appearances in *Singing School* by Brooke and other war writers such as Edmund Blunden, and because there is an autobiographical quality to some of the essays in *Survivors' Songs*, but Wilfred Owen is absent from *Singing School*, whereas he is the key figure in *Survivors' Songs*. Owen entered Stallworthy's life rather late; he had "never read Owen's poems with any care until I was in my thirties and came to them by a curiously circuitous route":

Invited to contribute to a volume of essays marking the centenary of Yeats's birth in 1865, I immersed myself in the Clarendon Press file of his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936) and wrote a piece on 'Yeats as Anthologist'. His brilliant polemical

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Introduction to the *Oxford Book* introduced me to my favourite poet's unfavourite poet, and prompted me to open—for the first time—*The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*. When I asked myself why the Old Man, celebrant of conflict and heroism, should have so detested the work of the Young, the answer was inescapable: they represented competing value-systems—Ancient and Modern, Homeric and humane—and in the 1930s, let alone the 1960s, there could be no competition. (86–87)

Stallworthy mentions this curiously circuitous route to Owen in two essays, "Owen's Afterlife" and "Owen and his Editors." There is some repetition in *Survivors' Songs* because the essays have been collected from other publications and from across at least a quarter of a century, but these moments mostly help to tie the essays together. For instance, "The Death of the Hero" states that "Leaving Oxford in 1940 to join a cavalry regiment, Keith Douglas embellished a photograph of himself in uniform—humorously, it must be said—with the scrolled caption 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'" (14), and "Owen's Afterlife" returns to this photograph:

The son of a decorated veteran of the Great War, he had long had a romantic interest in warfare and, enlisting in a cavalry regiment in 1940, enscrolled a photograph of himself in uniform with the words "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori." (75)

In both essays Stallworthy then provides lines from Douglas's "Gallantry":

Into the ears of the doomed boy, the fool
whose perfectly mannered flesh fell
in opening the door for a shell
as he had learnt to do at school.

In the first essay, Stallworthy is concerned with chivalric heroism, but in the other he is more interested in Owen's influence on other poets, noting in "Gallantry" "its echo of his 'Doomed Youth'; its use of the pararhyme he pioneered (fool/fell); its thematic and linguistic links with [Owen's] poem 'The Last Laugh'" (75). Stallworthy's exploration of Owen's afterlife is based on the belief that "often poems are prompted by memories from both life (frequently conscious) and literature (frequently subconscious)" (*Branch-Lines* 213).

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A great deal of *Survivors' Songs* is about Owen and his afterlife. Only two of the essays are entirely about Owen, but Owen features in all but one of the 13 essays. The essay that doesn't mention him, "England's Epic?" about *The Golden Warrior* (1948) by Hope Muntz, is the shortest, at only seven pages long. Stallworthy's book is about survivors' songs "From Maldon to the Somme," but it is closer to the Somme than to Maldon, especially if we take the Somme as the symbol it is seen as in "The Legacy of the Somme":

due to its cultural accretions, the Somme—like Troy, Hastings, and Agincourt—has come to stand for, to symbolize, something other and larger than itself: nothing less than the First World War, specifically, and modern mechanized warfare, generally. (108)

But Stallworthy's interest in earlier war poetry is genuine: in *Singing School* he relates that his enthusiasm for Old English was kindled by "a gnome-like New Zealander and a friend of my father" Jack Bennett (149), "the most gentle and peaceable of men who, by a strange irony, was required to introduce his freshmen not only to 'The Battle of Maldon' and *Beowulf* but also to another martial epic, Virgil's *Aeneid*" (151). *Survivors' Songs* has absorbed some of Jack Bennett's tutorials in "The Battle of Maldon." *Singing School* recalls Bennett's reply to the question "If the Saxons fought to the last man, had the poet fled from the battle?":

"Yes and no," said our tutor. Poets of the heroic age were expected to take their place in the shield-wall. (As a front-row forward, I approved of that.) But if the *comitatus* was facing certain defeat, its poet was expected to retire and raise the elegy by which alone his companions' deeds would be remembered down the generations. (151)

This scenario is the start of the essay "Survivors' Songs" and thus one of the reasons for the book carrying the same title: the poet of "The Battle of Maldon" fought in the shield wall, but "I see him at the last, taking leave of his companions and escaping, like Aneirin, soaked in blood, for his song's sake" (21). But at the end of *Survivors' Songs* we also have another explanation, that survival is not physical but literary: in "The Fury and the Mire," Stallworthy says that "more British poems of the First World War confirmed 'The Old Lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori' than challenged it," but "the poets whose work has survived sing a very

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different song" (194). Owen and Douglas survived too, even though they died in battle.

It's a shame that there isn't a whole essay on Keith Douglas in *Survivors' Songs*. Douglas is an excellent but still neglected poet, and Stallworthy clearly understands him. Like Stallworthy, Douglas is a love poet as well as a war poet (Stallworthy has edited *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* but also *The Penguin Book of Love Poetry*), and like Stallworthy Douglas was a man of action, fond of rugby—they both played in the same position in the front row, at hooker. Douglas is in some ways closer to Yeats than to Owen, but Stallworthy certainly doesn't reject Yeats just because Yeats rejected Owen: Stallworthy is a great admirer and scholar of Yeats's poetry, and he argues that "The Second Coming" should be included in "this unsatisfactory category" called "War Poetry" (178). Indeed, Owen admired Yeats's poetry. Equally, even though Brooke's "The Soldier" is usually held up as the opposite of Owen's poetry, the epitome of the poetry and values that Owen rejected, Stallworthy writes, "'The Soldier' would not have had the success it has had if it were not, in its way, a good poem" (54).

Brooke, though, is not a war poet, according to Stallworthy at the end of "Who Was Rupert Brooke?" The next essay begins by saying that "War Poet" is "hardly a satisfactory label at the best of times, and more than usually unsatisfactory in Sassoon's case." Sassoon said "I am a religious poet" (55). *Survivors' Songs* questions what "war poetry" and "war literature" might mean. It also uses the more specific categories "battlefield poetry" and "soldier-poet." Stallworthy questions what war literature is, but, like books such as *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (2005), edited by Vincent Sherry, he also expands what we might consider literature of the First World War to be. In the essay "War and Peace," where he looks at the First World War in fiction, the novels he focuses on wouldn't always be called Great War literature. "The Great War is, in every sense, at the centre of *To the Lighthouse*, although we only hear it off-stage in the 'Time Passes' section" (130), for instance, and "the war is again all but invisibly at the centre of L. P. Hartley's fine novel, *The Go-Between* (1953)" (134). The First World War is only mentioned once in *The Go-Between*: "when the first war came, my skill in marshalling facts was held to be more important than any service I was likely to perform on the field" (136). In the same way, Stallworthy could also have discussed *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Great Gatsby*, two great novels where the Great War is almost silent but at their center.

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A collection of essays about war literature will always fail to cover every aspect of the vast field, which even in this book begins before Maldon and stretches beyond the Somme to Vietnam and the war in Iraq. Indeed, “the poets of the First World War—the principal subject of the essays in this book—can be credited with kindling the anti-war fury that blazed through the streets of London in February 2003” (x). *Survivors’ Songs* is given coherence by the recurrence of the First World War. Owen is a leitmotif and the writer the other writers are compared with, even the standard by which they are judged. At the heart of the book, the seventh of the thirteen essays, “Owen and his editors,” is perhaps the best and most important. Here Stallworthy discusses his own edition of Owen’s poems and also those by his predecessors: Owen proclaimed himself a “poet’s poet,” and “the four substantive editions of his poems have been edited by five poets: Sassoon and Edith Sitwell (1920), Blunden (1931), Day Lewis (1963), and Stallworthy (1983)” (81). Stallworthy discusses his own long relationship with Owen’s manuscripts, and here we get a sense of Owen’s hands writing the poetry, as well as Blunden’s “judicious, sympathetic, and elegant handwritten draft” (83) and “Sassoon’s unmistakable hand” (94). Stallworthy is a wonderful poet for hands. So many of his poems feature hands: for example, titles include “Two Hands,” “The Play of Hands,” “Handiwork,” “Clasp,” and the collection *Hand in Hand* (1974); “Edward Thomas’s Fob-Watch” begins “Face to face, hand in hand” (*Branch-Lines* 213); “For Margaret and Geoffrey Keynes” refers to “the Donnes and Brookes / that fifteen years ago shook a boy’s hand” (*Rounding the Horn* 56); the villanelle “In the Park” repeats the line “The trees overhead are holding hands” (*Rounding the Horn* 115); and in “From W. B. Yeats to his friend Maud Gonne” Stallworthy can “picture him turning the pen in his hand / considering what to write” (*Rounding the Horn* 38).

Santanu Das (thanked in Stallworthy’s acknowledgments) is another writer interested in Owen’s hands. He notes that “Owen had lovely hands; Harold Owen remembers them as ‘expressive and peculiarly indicative’” (146). Stallworthy had described these hands in a poem called “Goodbye to Wilfred Owen,” which appeared in *The Anzac Sonata* (1986) soon after he had edited Owen’s poetry, and the poem should be read alongside the essay “Owen and His Editors”:

I am not myself nor are his
hands mine, though once I was at home
with them. Pale hands his mother praised,

Guy Cuthbertson

nimble at the keyboard, paler
now and still, waiting to be prised
from wood darker for their pallor.

(*Rounding the Horn* 190)

Singing School would serve as a good companion to *Survivors' Songs*, but Stallworthy's poetry is probably an even better companion. Like Blunden, "an experienced biographer, critic, and editor (as Sassoon and Sitwell were not)" (83), Stallworthy is a poet-critic in the true sense. His criticism is beautifully written, it's founded on the perception and the ear of a poet, and its subjects are also those of his poetry. His most recent war poem, "War Poet," is a survivor's song and a poem about songs and surviving. After the Great War, the war poet looks back like Aneurin after the battle of Catraeth: "herded with them downhill, / I was reprieved." The poem begins:

Back to South Leigh for evensong
and, in the sermon, watched the long
arm of the sun restore the Doom
above the chancel arch.

This opening is reminiscent of J. L. Carr's tremendous novel *A Month in the Country* (1980), which could have been discussed in the essay "War and Peace," and of the essay "Christ and the Soldier," but also of *Survivors' Songs* as a whole, a book that highlights and restores war poetry like the long arm of the sun shining on the Doom.

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Border Trouble:

American Modernities, Ethnic Modernisms, and the Politics of Literary History

Ethnic Modernism

by Werner Sollors

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. 336 pages

Christopher McVey

If the new transnational approaches to modernism attempt to complicate and redraw a literary history dominated by a few Eurocentric and nationally based canons, how might a study of ethnic modernism, whose very name implies either a quarantined subset or a non-normative version of modernist experimentation, contribute to this new mapping? This is not a question that Werner Sollors's *Ethnic Modernism*, a revised version of his contribution to volume 6 of *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, explicitly attempts to answer, but it certainly haunts the omnivorous genealogy that the book's seventeen chapters generate. Sollors seeks to understand how the aesthetic practices we've come to designate as modernist, first perceived as experimental, detached, unnecessarily difficult, and appealing to a limited group of sympathetic readers, ultimately installed themselves at the heart of a highly successful academic, commercial, and political enterprise. Perhaps the greatest asset of *Ethnic Modernism* is its resistance to any neat or oversimplified thesis about either the position of or the common denominator for ethnic writers in the United States. Sollors expresses interest, rather, in understanding the role of ethnic writers during a time when the US moved from the periphery to the center of global cultural production and capitalist empire. He also investigates how the institutionalization of modernism benefited from the work of minority writers and at the same time delegitimized it.

Ethnic Modernism thereby engages the expanding horizons—beyond and between national boundaries—of the new modernist studies that have recently been articulated by Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz. Though Sollors focuses on close readings of American authors and émigrés, his book's overall structure oscillates between these focused read-

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ings and a much wider optic, employing numerous tangents and unusual juxtapositions to generate provocative questions about the aesthetic and cultural attributes too often presupposed of modernist experimentation. Sollors considers, for example, the relationship between realist immigrant narratives and modernist politics: while some writers resisted experimental form, he demonstrates how their narratives nonetheless enunciated and occasionally challenged a binary logic that naturalized old world/new world differences. He structures *Ethnic Modernism* around a series of case studies of works by Gertrude Stein, Mary Antin, Jean Toomer, O. E. Rolvaag, Richard Wright, Ernest Hemingway, and Zora Neal Hurston, among others, building on earlier insights to construct what ultimately reads like an extended conversation about the nature and limitations of our standard definition of modernism.

He begins with an overview of modernism's history, interweaving major milestones in literature, music, art history, urbanization, and architecture. As with any selective reprise, it is not without its privileges and biases, but he selects in order to highlight rather than obfuscate seeming discrepancies in that history. Avoiding the colonial logic of Hugh Kenner's old internationalism (which, as will be remembered, cast many Americans—ethnic or not—as overly local and thus insufficiently modernist), *Ethnic Modernism* seeks to understand why modern art initially “seemed like a strange European invention,” why “modern music and jazz had subcultural or popular, not national or artistic significance,” why “the best modernist literature” often lacked readers (6)—and why, with surprising rapidity (as late as 1945, most of Faulkner's seventeen books were out of print) all this changed. Sollors argues that it was fascist and communist resistance to modernist form that gave “art for art's sake” a seemingly democratic bent, ushering in not only elite analyses like Clement Greenberg's “The Avant-Garde and Kitsch” but also President Dwight Eisenhower's embrace of modernist art as somehow inherently antipropagandistic.

After this survey, Sollors's remaining sixteen chapters divide themselves roughly across three themes: chapters 2–7 attempt to think about how “America” and identity politics were refigured by ethnic authors; chapters 8–13, focusing on Marx, Hemingway, Henry Roth, and others, investigate how some ethnic writers drew on modernist form and Hemingway's hard-boiled masculinity to represent and rewrite discourses of American community; and chapters 14–17 turn to international politics, totalitarianism, and the concept of cultural capital in order to argue

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that modernism succeeded in part by affiliating itself with the discourse promoting America as the privileged site of “antitotalitarian” ideology.

As Sollors demonstrates (though he isn’t eager to put it in these terms), it is exactly literary modernism’s status as ideological propaganda that at some times destabilized and at other times naturalized ethnic writers’ claims to an American identity. Although he acknowledges that Whitman, in an 1858 editorial in the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, asks, “is not America for the Whites? And is it not better so?” (qtd. in Sollors 14), he notes that ethnic writers “fought for a redefinition of America” (13) in the spirit of Whitman’s view that the US was “a nation of nations” (qtd. in Sollors 13). For Sollors, ethnic writers “tended to share Whitman’s worry that Americans had not yet learned that their own antecedents were ‘ampler than had been supposed’ and included many points of origin” (13–14). Origins and destinations become fuzzy terms in *Ethnic Modernism*, if only because some ethnic writers recoiled from the old world they had left (Antin, Toomer, and Roth, for example), while others registered a melancholic nostalgia for the premodern world and its clear cultural and ethnic boundaries or distinctions (Rølvaag, for instance, and, to an extent, Zora Neal Hurston).

Though careful to note important distinctions between his authors, Sollors creates a sense of cohesion among them by looking at how certain recurrent themes or narrative devices emerge and evolve as major tropes for immigrant literature. Public spaces—most notably the subway or the trolley—often become the literary and cultural sites of identity negotiation, and various writers reimagine totemic icons of America such as the Statue of Liberty. For one story of the *Independent’s* “Lifelets,” for instance, a Hungarian immigrant describes the statue’s torch as a funny broom that a man might live inside (49), whereas Mary Antin rewrites the “wretched refuse” phrase affixed to the statue, arguing that “what we get in the steerage is not the refuse but the sinew and bone of all nations” (76). As a consequence, Sollors suggests, Antin was able to refigure the immigrant narrative as one

in which Jewish immigrants can rightly invoke Pilgrims and Revolutionary heroes as ‘our Fathers.’ . . . Antin thus offered more than merely a personal or Jewish-American homemaking myth: hers was a homemaking myth writ large that included all immigrants to the United States. (76–77)

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Roth's *Call It Sleep*, by contrast, offers a modernist reinterpretation of the Statue of Liberty, describing it as a striking silhouette:

And before them, rising on her high pedestal from the scaling swamy brilliance of sunlit water to the west, Liberty. The spinning disk of the late afternoon sun slanted behind her, and to those on board who gazed, her features were charred with shadow, her depths exhausted, her masses ironed to one single plane. Against the luminous sky the rays of her halo were spikes of darkness roweling the air; shadow flattened the torch she bore to a black cross against the flawless light—the blackened hilt of a broken sword. Liberty. (qtd. in Sollors 143–44)

Roth's vision, typically for him, fuses modernist narrative technique (defamiliarization, parataxis, epiphanic sublime) with the thematics of nationhood, identity politics, and coloniality.

Sollors often lets his case studies speak for themselves, proceeding primarily as an arranger of deft juxtapositions, but he also offers moments of comparative analysis, noting for example that “Whereas Mary Antin had helped to redefine the official meaning of Liberty to stand for a welcome to immigrants, Roth casts her as the war god Ares or the angel with the flaming sword ready to drive humans out of paradise” (144). And later, considering Richard Wright alongside Zora Neal Hurston, Sollors realigns modernism as an ideological, rather than merely aesthetic, practice:

The point was not to choose between realism and modernism, but to use any technique that was likely to shake up readers and direct them toward the serious questions of the times, among which class inequality and racial segregation were prominent.
(163)

His comparisons are most useful when he underscores—as he frequently does—what these writers do not have in common: for example, he points to Wright's attack on Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the *New Masses* and suggests that for Wright,

the power of modernity, compounded by racial domination, was simply crushing. For him, segregation was omnipresent; for Hurston it was so marginal that she was the only major black writer to attack the first important Supreme Court decision for

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integration, *Brown v. Board of Education*, in a segregationist white Southern newspaper. (167)

Ethnic Modernism is broad in scope, but it fashions a continuum of immigrant or ethnic experience that allows Sollors to connect contending discourses of utopian idealism and shame, purity and hybridity, modernity and modernism. For example, during an extended close reading of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Sollors argues that the text consciously eschews stable generic categorization, resisting a

nostalgic wish for a return to traditional country values . . . [Go-
ing] on, and going on to create, searching for aesthetic wholeness
and a new vision in a fragmented modern world . . . impelled
Toomer to move forward the project of modernism. (104)

Invoking Toomer's 1929 declaration that "There is only one pure race—and this is the *human* race" (qtd. in Sollors 111), Sollors once more invokes Whitman's all-inclusive first-person singular *I* when he notes that being American, for Toomer, meant "an identification for people of all backgrounds who can acknowledge their shared and mixed characteristics" (111). Avoiding the simplicity of the melting-pot metaphor, Sollors further explores the way that all of his case studies negotiate the connection of two or more worlds: like Toomer's *Cane*, Roth's *Call It Sleep* connects these worlds "in such a way that there was always 'a world somewhere, somewhere else,' different and yet similar to the one inhabited or fictionalized" (156). Recalling Roth's protagonist's attempt to touch the electrified third rail of trolley tracks in the midst of his guilt concerning Jewish familial and ethnic betrayal, as well as his quest "for the purification of the 'dirt' inherent in the family story, for an escape from the darkness of the cellar and the closet to the world of light" (152), Sollors notes that "This process was also experienced as a deep crisis, a burnout, and a short circuit" (156).

In many ways, *Ethnic Modernism* does seem a bit too concerned with policing aesthetic borders while charting crossings between political or national ones. The fourth chapter, "Ethnic Themes, Modern Themes," outlines "four basic literary types" that emerged during the onset of early twentieth-century modernity, engaged in respectively by writers critical of modernity who used traditional or antimodernist forms; writers sympathetic to modernity who also resisted modernist form; writers

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who criticized modernity through modernist form; and finally writers who expressed enthusiasm for modernity through modernist form, often deploying it against nostalgia for tradition or old-world identity. Though Sollors acknowledges that this is an “obviously simplified fourfold distinction,” he uses it to suggest that modernity “may have been more popular than nostalgia in ethnic writing”—albeit a version of modernity distinct from the combination of modernist aesthetics and antimodern themes we associate with figures like Eliot, Pound, and to a lesser extent Faulkner. “What is often associated with American ‘high modernism,’” Sollors writes,

may have been a particular Anglo-American blend of opposition to modernity expressed in aesthetically modernist forms, whereas African-American, immigrant, and other ethnic writers may have been less frequently inclined to endorse modernist strategies of opposing modernity. (64)

It is from its own limited vantage point, Sollors suggests, that classic high modernism categorizes ethnic writing as populist and lacking in detachment, and thereby “‘not really’ modernist” (64). Rather than exploring this point, however, he ends the chapter there, raising more questions than he answers. Is he suggesting that we critique this vantage point, and if so, wouldn’t his fourfold system of categories reinforce rather than challenge these grounds of comparison? If, on the other hand, he wants to hold onto these distinctions, then why does *Ethnic Modernism* devote so much attention and acumen to cutting across and between them? In the end, the greatest asset of *Ethnic Modernism* is its implicit unraveling of an umbrella category or set of practices for ethnic writers, recalling Salman Rushdie’s resistance to lumping all commonwealth writers together, as if such divergent experiences share the same problems or relations to empire. Sollors similarly seeks to expose the multiplicity repressed by modernism’s institutionalization.

The final chapters of *Ethnic Modernism* offer a history of this process routed through the influence of world politics and totalitarian policies on both immigrant and modernist literature. Sollors contends that it was the perceived threats of fascist and communist ideologies that “pulled American writers into . . . new international constellations” (184), contrasting Ezra Pound’s work with that of W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, and others. Fascism, Sollors suggests, “appealed to the paradoxical need of

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some writers for a 'forward-looking nostalgia,' for a mix of military-style order and ethnic homogeneity," whereas communism made class "the central category of human divisions" (190). Immigrant literature served to legitimate America's opposition to both these regimes, since it

helped to redefine American democracy as totalitarianism's opposite. The American dream might still be incomplete, but the new wisdom seemed to be that the dream was destined to be completed in the multiethnic, nontotalitarian United States.

(201)

Pointing out that many writers returned to realism, especially throughout the 1930s and 40s, Sollors discusses how this move strengthened modernism's political and aesthetic claims, arguing that construing realism

at best as the mold out of which modernism must always emerge and at worst as the handmaiden of terror helped to make modernism appear as the truly expressive art of antifascist and anti-Stalinist resistance, as the signature expression of American democracy. (218)

As articulated by both Greenberg and Adorno, the refusal to communicate "could become the central achievement of an artist, and a sign of his or her resistance to the ideologies of the market" (215). In this way modernism legitimated its political virtue by its very claim to a position outside of political propaganda. Sollors ends by suggesting that modernism's story of itself—as both a historical genealogy and a set of aesthetic strategies—was really "a selective story that was based on omissions and conflation. It was a story that may now have run its course" (240).

In making this claim, does *Ethnic Modernism* merely replace one grand narrative with another? Perhaps. But it's certainly a useful and convincing replacement, valuable for anyone who studies modernism and American literature. It's a version of the story that challenges how and why we structure our accounts of early twentieth-century literature, whether for undergraduate syllabi or comparative research. *Ethnic Modernism* orchestrates an elegant and well-researched conversation between canonical and noncanonical texts, drawing on a diverse array of writers and historical moments from the center to the periphery of modernism's institutionalization in the academy. The picture it paints is not comprehensive by any means, but it's one that is sorely overdue, fueled by incisive and provoca-

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tive questions, and unafraid to take risks. Sollors has much to add to the new modernist studies of Mao and Walkowitz. *Ethnic Modernism* must be seen as part of this re-vision, complicating the politics of a modernism which still haunts the American academy, and especially its literary critics.

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Potus-R-Us

A Pinnacle of Feeling:

American Literature and Presidential Government

by Sean McCann

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. 248 pages

Elizabeth Freeman

We have just elected a president who combines a strong, centralized vision of executive power with a seeming ability to feel for others and intense oratorical skills. If we are to take Sean McCann's impressive book *A Pinnacle of Feeling* as a guide, Barack Obama would seem the acme of what Americans want and expect from the presidency: the perfect blend of coercion, sympathy, and a rhetorical prowess that—though often remarked on in implicitly racist terms—is nevertheless impressive both in its own right and by contrast with the agrammatical stammerings of George W. Bush. Though McCann's book is extremely timely, it actually takes the long historical view of our culture's presidential fantasies. Americans, he writes, hunger for and celebrate leaders who see social change in executive terms yet also mitigate this power with a sympathy evidenced by lyricism and with self-sacrifice even unto martyrdom. *A Pinnacle of Feeling* usefully extends and to a certain extent corrects Dana Nelson's discussion of "presidentialism," where "[t]he hard body of the president offers us a strong guarantee for national boundaries and self-identity [and the] soft body of the president holds out for us sensations of democratic recognition and egalitarian exchange" (Nelson 226). For martyrdom, McCann demonstrates, tenders up that soft body as the necessary currency of hard leadership.

More eccentric, but ultimately convincing, is McCann's claim that there is a "classic literature of presidential power" (158) through which we can track literary attitudes toward this commanding but sensitive head of state. In other hands, this might be a cringe-worthy "images of our leader" project, but McCann demonstrates a long history of authorial investment in the poetics as well as the politics of the presidency. Not surprisingly, he locates the paradigmatic example of this in Walt Whitman, an admirer of Lincoln who in his journals claimed that "I love the President personally"

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(qtd. in McCann x) and saw the presidency as a figure for his own status as poet. For Whitman, the president could even exceed his constitutional powers if he had a progressive social vision that he appeared willing to die for. But McCann argues that Whitman's attitude was an exception rather than the rule in the nineteenth century, when the political imaginary centered more on Congress than the president. For ongoing executive fantasy, McCann turns to the twentieth century.

A Pinnacle of Feeling begins its consideration of twentieth-century presidential poetics by explicating a seemingly throwaway scene in *Native Son*, where a madman in Bigger Thomas's cell delivers a demented, ranting State of the Union address aimed at the president. Implicitly following Lauren Berlant's work on diva citizenship, where minoritized citizens "desire to enter a senator's body and to dominate it through an orifice he was incapable of closing, an ear or an eye" (241), McCann uses the scene to sketch out the quintessentially American fantasy of personal intimacy with a godlike chief of state, a delusion apparently common to the New Deal black leaders whom Wright excoriated. But in contrast to Berlant's divas, who offer up their mock-monarchical black bodies as counterpoints to the logic of democratic abstraction, in McCann's bravura reading Bigger himself comes to embody just the sort of president we desire despite ourselves: willing to use force if necessary, speaking poetry at the moment of crisis no matter how inarticulate in general, and finally ennobled by the sympathetic binding of a community over his doomed body.

Indeed, McCann's attention to the place of oratory and executive eloquence in our collective presidential imaginary grounds what otherwise might be mere argument by analogy, where the aesthetic powers with which authors seek to foster collective consciousness find their homologue in the president. McCann claims Wright as part of a New Deal "literary endeavor whose most basic terms were shaped by the rising theory of presidential government—a literary mission that drew on, imitated, and adapted that political theory, even as it sought ideas for a rival agenda" (32). That cause-effect claim may seem to make less sense for other parts of the century that were not as defined by their presidents as was the New Deal era, yet McCann maintains a good balance between arguments that depend on authors' direct engagements with the presidency and those that do not. In other words, as with his previous book *Gumshoe America*, he reveals that the literature of a supposedly apolitical high modernism

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and postmodernism is consistently engaged with liberal political theory, whether routed directly through allusions to the presidency or indirectly through the discourses giving meaning to it.

McCann's first two chapters exemplify the way *A Pinnacle of Feeling* moves between interpreting direct citations of the presidency and examining the discursive structures attending to it. In chapter 1, McCann claims Gertrude Stein as an explicit nationalist. He argues that she, like Wright, imagined her writing "as a form of political leadership" (36) that sometimes restored and sometimes rivaled executive power. While Stein began her career agreeing with the Progressive-era belief in the literally natural evolution of democratic impulses among the American people, she eventually adopted a Nietzschean view of power, exemplified and articulated through her famous use of repetition against teleology in works like "Melanctha." As McCann tells it, Stein's cubist belief in the incommensurability of multiple perspectives culminated in a libertarian, anti-Progressive Americanism: her lectures celebrated an America "distinct only for its overriding commitment to individual freedom" (62). In McCann's second chapter on Zora Neale Hurston and Henry Roth, though, the contested scene of executive power seems less national than religious: it is difficult to say whether these two authors, black and Jewish respectively, are solely concerned with the narrow scope of Beltway politics. Not every embrace of law (as in Roth's case) or rejection of it in favor of eroticized primal violence (as in Hurston's case) is a tacit commentary on the Oval Office; one could equally call the former Levitical and the latter pagan. Yet McCann deftly marshals *Call It Sleep* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* to lay bare the Christian aspects of the sentimental presidential imaginary, in which the law is reborn as the people's natural response to suffering.

By the time McCann gets to *The Catcher in the Rye*, one wonders how he is going to pull this argument off, as Salinger's novel seems completely disinterested in matters national. Yet there it is: Holden's distaste for his roommate's "Abraham Lincoln, sincere voice" (64; qtd. in McCann 101), McCann demonstrates, figures his era's more general disgust for the strong-arm sentimentalism of the New Deal era. In fact, McCann views the 1950s as in many ways a return to nineteenth-century Congressionalism. The Cold War era's lack of a centralized executive vision, he argues, led to a culture based on casual, fluid interpersonal bonds whose worst version produced an endless array of shape-shifting and whose

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best version was exemplified, in both Salinger's novel and in Nabokov's *Lolita*, by children at play. From both Holden Caulfield's fantasy of catching children as they run across a field of rye toward a cliff and Humbert Humbert's terrible realization that *Lolita's* voice will never join the chorus of shouting schoolchildren he overhears on a hilltop, McCann extracts a rather insidious fantasy of political sociality uncoerced by either literary or executive fiat. This analysis of play as an image of natural consent fruitfully intersects with Lee Edelman's recent description of how American politics is occulted by the Child as the figure of the future. McCann's eclectic and daring chapter, though, addresses race in ways Edelman does not, finishing with a reassessment of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Here Ellison emerges as a nationalist who saw the danger of this 1950s-style pluralist bargaining: that covenants require sacrifices, and that our national one has required the sacrifice of black Americans. At the same time, McCann argues, Ellison turns black people into a renewed image of the presidency itself, in which black martyrdom, paradoxically, guarantees national justice.

By the Vietnam era, McCann claims, the wounded veteran had taken up this martyrological mantle in the popular imagination. In a chapter examining critics such as Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, and Michael Walzer, McCann shows how their criticisms of a weakly pluralist liberal state and the inattention of its citizens implicitly and explicitly called for a strong national leadership, this time justified and mitigated by the suffering of its militiamen. Here McCann recalibrates the 1960s as a decade whose anti-imperialism, such as it was, gave way to the same old domestic story: "we" failed to pay attention and exercise our collective will, and the writer's job, akin to that of the failed presidency, was to return us to ourselves as a people for whom the bonds among wounded soldiers would be metonymic. Crucially, though, this "people" would understand itself as antagonist to the state and as the locus of a pure national identity. As we emerge from the debacle in Iraq, McCann's analysis seems especially prescient: we would do well to consider how critiques of imperialism and sympathy for veterans can return us to American exceptionalism, and how we Americans like to figure ourselves, as McCann puts it, as "indigenous victims of [our] own imperial power" (155).

In a final chapter, McCann offers Don DeLillo's *Libra* as the pinnacle of literary feelings about the presidency. In this novel, Lee Harvey Oswald occupies the position of *Native Son's* madman, hungry to address power, to enter history, to seize the president by his lapels. This is also, in Mc-

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Cann's analysis, the position of *Libra*'s conspirators to kill Kennedy and of another character who is a novelist attempting to make sense of the Kennedy assassination. Oswald, the conspirators, and the novelist all revel in imagining that the president's abuses of executive power in secret missions and covert operations eventually turned against him. "The Kennedy assassination," McCann writes, "is thus made to seem the inevitable consequence of the underside of the Cold War State. It emerges naturally out of the desires and resentments stirred up in a society" (172) whose leaders imprison us in a wartime state of emergency. It also emerges, in his analysis, out of the way the presidential office had come to mean, precisely, the binding of a populace through the rhetorical means of which Kennedy was a master. For according to McCann, the inculcated American hunger for charismatic leadership can only overwhelm and destroy the leader himself: thus Lee Harvey Oswald becomes the figure for a populace—and even a president—assassinated by the failings of executive prowess.

All of this does not, as McCann hints in his epilogue, bode well for Obama. It does, however, make some sense of a literary work that appeared after McCann's book went to press: the African American poet Elizabeth Alexander's inaugural poem "Praise Song for the Day," a poem charged with the task of addressing Obama's vision of reconstructing the United States' class relations, if not explicitly its racial ones. McCann reminds us that Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize lecture celebrated Lincoln's Gettysburg address as "a kind of poetry that made nothing happen" (qtd. in McCann 186) and therefore as the epitome of noncoercion. So too does Alexander's poem undercut any suggestions that Obama's way with words could dangerously bind or blind us.

For "Praise Song" is, in the tradition of Whitman before his love affair with presidential politics, a poem about people milling around and talking. "We encounter each other in words, words / spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed, / words to consider, reconsider," (lines 16–18; my emphasis) declares the poem's speaker, making rhetoric the scene of encounter rather than executive charisma. The speaker exhorts us to "say it plain" (24), to sing "the names of the dead" (25), not soldiers but bricklayers and railroad builders, migrant farmworkers and janitors. There is no analogy between president and poet here, indeed no suggestion that poetry elevates or unifies us: just a plurality of "ancestors on our tongues" (6), a vision of semiarticulate "hand-lettered signs" and "figuring it out at kitchen tables" (32–33), and eventually one word: "love" (36). Tellingly,

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Alexander's own words have also been taken to task, by bloggers and their commenters who mock her for demanding that we "say it plain" and then using clichés like "glittering edifices" (29), for the lack of euphony in "cotton and lettuce" (28), for the legalese of "love with no need to pre-empt grievance" (39), for her poem's overall prosiness.¹ But as I reread Alexander's poem in the wake of having finished *A Pinnacle of Feeling*, the poem looks as much a prophylactic as a praise song. For if sympathy appears in and as the ability to reach the populace with words in a "soft" form of coercion, and if this coercion is mitigated by an executive martyrdom whose unmarked corollary is the suffering and death of African Americans, then Obama would seem to have no choice but eventually to fall upon the sword of his silver tongue. Perhaps "Praise Song" is a subtle corrective to that logic, allowing us to imagine a president who listens to us talk as well as he talks to us. As one commenter put it,

The poem fit perfectly with Obama's speech, which was also, thankfully, lacking in rhetorical froofroo. Not a single "Ask not what your country can do for you . . ." anywhere on the horizon! Hooray! We really are at a new beginning. (Jagadeesan)

Perhaps we are, in literary criticism as well as in literature. The best recent books on twentieth-century literature that follow the critical legacy of Walter Benn Michaels and the New Historicists—including McCann's own *Gumshoe America*, Michael Szalay's *New Deal Modernism*, and Jani Scandura and Michael Thurston's *Modernism, Inc.*—have tended to subsume questions of governmental coercion into analyses of market forces. It's interesting to see the market put aside for a focus on the seemingly more changeable, even trivial question of presidential power, which I suppose could be read as a kind of anti-Foucaultian return to the repressive hypothesis or as a way of putting government back into Cultural Studies' notions of governmentality. But it may be time for just that. As we've witnessed under George W. Bush, it's just when we think power has been utterly decentralized that we may find ourselves without checks and balances, both governmentally and financially. And this may ultimately be as true for the Obama administration as it was for the previous one. That so many literary authors of the last century were, in various ways, tracking this issue both aesthetically and topically is a bracing surprise: that it would take until the twenty-first century for a literary critic to take notice of literature's role in imagining tripartite government and its alternatives

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is even more so. McCann's very fine book invites us not only toward the usual critically engaged citizenship but also toward a more literally *civic* criticism.

Note

1. For several of these criticisms, see Carole Rumens.

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What Was Postmodernism?

After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s

by Samuel Cohen

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Steven Wandler

Like the decade that followed the end of the Second World War, the 1990s are beginning to look like a decade that might best be characterized as transitional. Just as the wars between nations that dominated the century until 1945 gave way, by 1955, to an ideological stalemate between two superpowers, the 1990s seem, from our foreshortened perspective at the end of the decade following, as a time that moved us gradually out of a Cold War and into a War on Terror. These two transitional periods are characterized by how they were pulled between the need to reflect on what went before and the desire to anticipate (and shape) what was to come—a characterization that applies as well to the fiction produced in the two periods. The black humor and experimental fiction of the earlier period, in view of what followed, seem today to be more like a presaging of the postmodernism to come than a commentary on the high modernism that preceded the Second World War. Likewise, the fiction of the 1990s—a period when certain excesses of postmodernism began not only to lose their glamour but became so endemic to culture that they fueled a decade of culture wars and began to function as a kind of self-parody—might ultimately prove to be more about what comes after than what came before.

Though it might be early to make such claims with any confidence, Samuel Cohen's *After the End of History* does much to advance the process of bringing the remarkable literature of the 1990s and its position in American literary history into sharper focus. Cohen accomplishes this by examining several preeminent authors of the decade in readings that look both backward and forward, both reflectively and anticipatorily. What emerges from his consistently impressive and often surprisingly fresh readings is an argument for a decade of fiction that engaged not only the ambiguous aftermath of the Cold War but also the ambiguous legacy of the fiction produced during it. Ultimately, his argument might prove to

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be an early step in showing us how the 1990s was the decade in which postmodernism—as a genre if not of fiction then at least of theory—began to wane.

Cohen's central argument throughout *After the End of History* is that the literature of the 1990s—an “interwar decade” occupying the time between “the fall of the Wall and the fall of the Towers” (4)—is usefully characterized as reacting primarily to the “triumphalist reception of the end of the Cold War” (3). This reception, he argues, was one in which the end of the Cold War was seen not only in parochial terms as the victory of the United States over the Soviet Union but also in more universal terms as the ultimate, definitive triumph of capitalism over socialism, of liberalism over communism—as Francis Fukuyama famously put it, the end of ideological conflict and thus the end of history. This notion of an end to history presumes, of course, that history is a story of ideological progression—in other words, a story of ideas that is going somewhere, a somewhere that is discovered by arguments. At the end of the Cold War, one side seemed to have won the argument conclusively, so history had nowhere else to go, nothing else to do. One of Cohen's points is that in order to find something to do without history, many of America's cold warriors became culture warriors, securing America's triumph by idealizing its past, present, and future in terms of that victory. He offers the example of Patrick Buchanan's “[a]ggressive protection” of America's past, seeing it as “a way to protect America, for the present and in the future, from any doubts about America's rightness, its justification in using violence, and its continued triumph” (9–10). These triumphalist narratives, which Cohen reads as both stemming from and speaking to particular political and cultural visions of America's history and future, insist that the American victory in the Cold War was both a justification for America's actions and a verification of America's virtues.

Certain novelists of the 1990s, Cohen argues, were especially concerned with challenging or at least complicating this unambiguous narrative of American triumph. A large point of these novelists' work is to resist in a fundamental way the idea that history can “end” in this or any other sense, or that any triumph can be definitive, permanent, or wholly innocent. Rather than embrace the “comfort of closure” that a triumphalist interpretation of the Cold War makes available (130), these writers insist on emphasizing the importance of ambiguity, openness, and contingency in terms of both the future and the past. Indeed, Cohen claims

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that “American stories that acknowledge the terror of the future and resist imposing closure on the past are becoming increasingly important” (186). He translates this openness to the future and the past into a sharp analysis not only of how narratives can construct history itself but also how the unfolding of the present can alter the kinds of narratives about the past that are available: “these novels don’t just do history: they reflect historically on the making of historical narrative, examining how the times in which we live shape the way we understand the past” (4). Generally speaking, he argues that this resistance to the kind of simple, comforting closure that triumphalism demands informs his writers’ sensibility about the past as well as their visions of the future:

In connecting stories of the past not only to the present in which they are constructed but also to the uncertain future, these post-Cold War novels show that history does not end—that historical narrative, as it is constructed, received, and revised, continues to shape in very particular ways how Americans see themselves, and, so, how they act in the world. (29)

Though not explicitly structured as such, Cohen’s argument can be seen to unfold in two distinct parts, the first engaging three prominent postmodern writers and their legacies, and the second connecting the urge to triumphalist history to narratives of trauma. The first part, which occupies the first three chapters of the book, examines Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*, Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*, and Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*, all of which were published, remarkably, in 1997. (Another of Cohen’s texts, Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*, was also published in that year, marking perhaps a high-water mark for American fiction of the 1990s.) This coincidence might be understood, Cohen argues, “partly as what happens when writers reach an age and stage in their careers that leads them to look back—and do so at a time when the culture of which they are a part also looks backs” (94). This confluence of events—the fact that each of these writers, all born between 1931 and 1937, were feeling reflective at a moment when American triumph in the Cold War prompted the culture at large to reflect on the events culminating in that triumph—leads Cohen to conclude that these three novels by these three writers are as much about their own works’ history as they are about America’s.

Cohen’s chapter on Pynchon—perhaps the strongest in the book—strives to demonstrate that “[u]nlike Pynchon’s earlier works, [*Mason &*

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Dixon] accepts neither paranoia nor hopelessness nor unknowability" (54). Indeed, the novel deliberately rejects, in writing about an already finished past, the sense of "inevitability" (54) that history naturally inspires (and Pynchon's earlier works agonized over), and through the characters of Mason and Dixon, Pynchon presents not only "round, sympathetic, engaging characters" unique in his oeuvre (49) but also an openness to "the possibility of what might seem historically impossible" and a recognition that "history could have turned out differently and can still" (52). The central motif Cohen employs is the tension between the line Mason and Dixon are charting, which will eventually split the country in two, and the ampersand that joins them together in the novel's title. Cohen argues that reading the novel in terms of the ampersand allows us to understand Pynchon's vision for the possibility of "the simultaneous coexistence of the ideas of distinctness and unity, of difference and individual identity" (47).

This is a compelling claim, one that does much to move beyond the usual reading of the novel as only about the shuttering of American possibility, the corruption of American ideals, and the loss of America's historical innocence that the Mason-Dixon line represents. By insisting on the equal importance of the ampersand, Cohen articulates an interpretation of Pynchon's story of the Enlightenment that is "less celebratory than the traditional version" but also "more nuanced than the usual revision" (36). The & that unites Mason with Dixon even as their line divides the future nation underlines

the connections between disparate moments from across American history, the feeling that those explosions of change are repeated resurfacings of possibility, of alternative outcomes for an only seemingly inevitable future. (57)

Cohen's treatment of Roth and Morrison is more explicitly related to these writers' sense of the legacy of their works. Cohen reads Roth's *American Pastoral*, a novel centered in Nathan Zuckerman's imagined retelling of the history and consequences of a Vietnam-era protest bombing of a post office, as in large measure his reflection on the "bomb [Roth] himself set off in his own work" with *Portnoy's Complaint* (88). This earlier novel was Roth's "revolt" against "the middle class morality, ethnic superiority, and narrow and stifling worldview he saw in American Jewry at midcentury," and *American Pastoral* is Roth's "reevaluation of this revolt at

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century's end" (67–68). *American Pastoral* thus functions in the same way as Pynchon's ampersand: recognizing the value of liberation, the novel also recognizes that in any liberation there are always concurrent losses. Roth's novel is a reflection on his earlier brazenness and an attempt to make explicit his desire to "move beyond the simplicity of one's own belief and the surety with which others are rejected" (90)—a simplicity that finds echoes, again, in America's triumphalism at the end of the Cold War. Similarly, in his reading of *Paradise*, Cohen argues that the novel represents Morrison's attempt to retell the story she told in *The Bluest Eye* in a way she could not tell it then—not because of her "artistic inexperience" in her first novel (105) but because of her insistence on a kind of racial essentialism. He argues that the reflective consciousness pervasive after the end of the Cold War perhaps pushed Morrison to see that this sense of racial essentialism was "at the root of the fundamental narrative and intellectual structure of her previous work" (96); and with *Paradise*, she begins to reject such essentialism as "repeat[ing] the mistakes made by white supremacist thinking" (108).

The second movement in Cohen's argument, which occurs in chapters 4 and 5, explores the impulse to closure and the importance of openness in four novels: Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*, Joan Didion's *The Last Thing He Wanted*, Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*, and Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (the latter two written in the early 2000s). O'Brien's and Didion's novels are Cold War stories written after the end of the Cold War, and thus, Cohen argues, are novels centrally concerned with how, at the moment of American triumph, we "look back at the act of looking back" (123). Here he makes a strong connection between triumphalist and trauma narratives, claiming that behind both is the "same deep desire for the comfort of closure" (130): triumphalist narratives like Fukuyama's and Buchanan's attempt to declare victory in and over the past and move on, while trauma narratives work to examine past wounds as a way to heal and move past them—in both forms the past is engaged, but only for the purpose of transcending it in the interests of the present and future. The novels by O'Brien and Didion, however, resist this impulse by refusing to accept that the past can or should be entirely forgotten or even transcended. Instead they show that "an open wound [is] more useful than one that has healed over" (137). By eschewing both clear progression (triumphalism) and healing narratives (trauma), the novels avoid the "false magic of illusory closure" (137). This is not true of Eugenides's *Middlesex*,

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which Cohen (refreshingly) calls an “aesthetic failure” (160) precisely because it embraces rather than rejects such closure. Because the novel refuses to engage the complications of its main character’s hermaphroditism and instead allows an otherwise “open-ended” story “to turn out all right in the end,” Cohen sees it as indicative of the “desire for closure . . . common to many aspects of American culture after 9/11” (161). Lethem’s *Fortress of Solitude*, by contrast, does resist this desire, and its main characters “learn to accept change, to recognize the fact of contingency, and reject false closure” (185).

Taken as a whole, Cohen’s *After the End of History* makes a strong case not only for this resistance to closure as emblematic of his writers’ reaction to Cold War triumphalism but also for what he ventures might be a “literary history after postmodernism” (187). Though writing primarily about the Cold War, he also deftly deals with 9/11 and its aftermath, particularly what he characterizes as the “return to the fear-filled yet comfortingly familiar world of us-versus-them” (6). In *The Shape of the Signifier* Walter Benn Michaels would appear to agree with such a characterization, except that rather than seeing it as signifying the end of postmodernism, he sees it as marking its apotheosis:

Although a good many people described the attack as marking the end of what they called postmodernism—claiming that, in its face, no one could remain a postmodernist—the truth is that the response to it marked the complete triumph of postmodernism, or, as it should, perhaps, in its most purely theoretical form, be called, posthistoricism. Conflict in posthistoricism is between subject positions, not ideas, between what is and its negation, between people who aren’t afraid of change and people who are. (181–82)

Michaels’s point here is that without history—without ideological conflict—we cannot have interpretation, only experience. In other words, we cannot have knowledge, only individual subjectivity. In his discussion of Morrison, Cohen takes specific aim at Michaels’s view:

The novels that are the subject of this book are very much concerned with the finding and construction of meaning. . . . Many of these post–Cold War novels seem intent not on respecting group identity and its rootedness in the past but rather on having arguments with themselves and others about what to think about these things. (117)

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Cohen's point here echoes one that he makes in his introduction, where he objects to Fredric Jameson's famous claim that the postmodern novel is unable to represent reality: the novel has *always* questioned its ability to represent reality, and it has *always* grappled with the kinds of questions about belief, identity, and nation that Cohen's book engages. This, Cohen argues, "calls into question the idea that the contemporary novel represents a new stage of literary evolution" and shows instead that "postwar novelists have not been inventing new forms but rather have returned, cyclically, to these old forms in order to continue saying things about the world" (25). As his readings of Pynchon's ampersand *as well as* Mason and Dixon's line, of Roth's liberation *and* loss, of the desire for closure *and* openness, ably demonstrate, these larger—and deeper—questions never went away from the contemporary novel. What might have gone away instead was a theory that engaged the fictions themselves. As Cohen claims of Jameson, his "version of postmodernism, understanding contemporary culture as part of a dialectic leading teleologically to a resolution of the contradictions inherent under capitalism, leads him to ignore important things" (24). Cohen himself at times falls victim to this very same move: his reading of the run-up to the Iraq War as another form of the desire for narrative closure is particularly unnerving, if for no other reason than its demonstration of how small literary criticism can often seem when placed next to larger events. Nonetheless, *After the End of History* is a compelling and important step in the right direction: an argument that refuses to ignore important things and that, we might say, strives to argue in terms of the picture and not the frame.

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Introduction: Darwin and Literary Studies

Jonathan Greenberg

Roughly a decade ago, it could be said that Charles Darwin's thought was notably absent from the discipline of literary studies. Although Darwin had long been seen as an important influence on specific writers or movements—Conrad and Hardy in England, for example, or American naturalism—this influence seemed to amount to little more than a fatalist recognition of the cruel logic of a godless cosmos. A major thinker of the nineteenth century, Darwin appeared to have almost no place in the various discourses that informed twentieth-century literary analysis, from Russian formalism and New Criticism through cultural materialism and queer theory. It is true that a few important works had been written in the 1980s that explicitly brought the insights and methods of contemporary theory to bear on Darwin and his cultural and intellectual legacies: here Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots*, Margot Norris's *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* still stand out as vibrant works of scholarship. Yet while these books are cited and praised even today, they never launched entire research programs in the manner of contemporaneous works such as Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men*, or Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

This relative absence of Darwin from literary discussion was understandable, if regrettable. After all, applications of Darwin's thought to the social, the political, and the cultural have a notorious track record, having justified both eugenicists' interventions into human reproductive rights and Social Darwinists' justifications of social and economic inequalities. Humanists could be excused for expecting that renewed efforts at Darwinian cultural analysis would only reach intellectually predictable or politically repugnant conclusions. But wariness of such reductive ideas or

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reactionary agendas seemed to have quietly given way to outright avoidance of Darwin and even biology itself. An epistemological skepticism or methodological rigor regarding specific lines of argument had calcified into an unchallenged assumption that any gesture toward the biological would inevitably revive the kind of false universalisms that literary studies had spent much of the 1980s and 90s unmasking.

At the same time, outside of literary studies, just the opposite trend seemed to be happening: Darwin was assuming an ever-greater prominence in scholarly and other public discourses. During the 1990s several disciplines beyond the hard sciences, such as philosophy, anthropology, and psychology, were taking up Darwinian theory, while journalists and popularizers pumped out one best seller after another claiming to explain all manner of phenomena in terms of evolution by natural selection. In the public sphere, the most visible of these disciplines was the field of evolutionary psychology. Building on the sociobiology worked out in the 1970s by E. O. Wilson, Richard Dawkins, Robert Trivers, and others, evolutionary psychology explicitly sought, under the banner of Wilson's "consilience,"¹ to apply theoretical models from evolutionary biology to human behavior. And while its claims remain highly controversial, the discipline itself, as Dana Carluccio points out in her contribution to this issue, "has become astonishingly popular over the last twenty-five years, both as a research program and as a pop culture phenomenon" (510). Carluccio observes:

Its proliferating publishing venues, academic societies, and textbooks are echoed by journalism, novels, and movies that have trumpeted the field's hypotheses, making them as ubiquitous in US culture today as psychoanalytic notions, such as Freudian slips. Someone who has never heard of evolutionary psychology is nonetheless likely to believe that men find physical cues of female fertility (like youth) attractive because it helps them pass on their genes. (510–11)

Of course, if evolutionary psychological reasoning has passed over into pop culture or common sense—or, maybe more precisely, into what John Guillory has called "spontaneous philosophy"² ("Sokal" 476)—it might be suspected that this transition has been effortless for the simple reason that the gap was so narrow to begin with. Quasi-Darwinian pop-culture factoids concerning the infidelity of men or the industriousness of the

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wealthy may resonate strongly with conventional wisdom simply because it is in conventional wisdom that they originate.

But whether or not the success of a Darwin-flavored spontaneous philosophy can be attributed (or reduced) to the ideological work that it does in a free-trading, globalizing world, it was surely predictable that Darwinism in one form or another would at last make an impact on literary studies. One way in which this impact has been felt is through the rise of a "literary Darwinism." Trumpeted as "the next big thing" in *The New York Times*,³ this minischool proceeds from premises laid out by evolutionary psychology and sociobiology, and is often, though by no means always, hostile to the last four decades of literary theory.⁴ The basic premise of literary Darwinism is that because the human brain is a product of evolutionary adaptation, and because literature is a product of the human brain, then principles of evolutionary biology can be profitably extended to literature—first to literature as a general cultural entity (why it came about), then to broad literary categories and structures such as narrative, genre, and meter, and finally to the analysis or interpretation of particular works.⁵ Of course, the sorts of claims that this vein of research generates, along with the objections to them, will be familiar to many readers, and those conversant with the history of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology will readily discern the contours of the old debates that Andrew Brown has dubbed "the Darwin wars": those in-house battles among evolutionists where Gould, Lewontin, and Eldredge clashed with Wilson, Dawkins, and Dennett about spandrels, punctuated equilibrium, and the value of regarding the gene as the unit of natural selection.

Although my own skepticism about the stronger claims of evolutionary psychology is no doubt evident by now, it is not the aim of this issue either to adjudicate those claims or to apply them to literary studies. (Two other journals, *Philosophy and Literature* and *Poetics Today*, have already offered special issues more strictly devoted to literary Darwinism, and collections of essays are now appearing alongside individually authored volumes.⁶) On the other hand, since this is a journal of literary criticism, it should at least be noted that debates about evolution—particularly about efforts to extend it into the cultural, political, social, and ethical domains—are consistently marked by illustrative uses of the literary. Stephen Jay Gould, for example, famously borrows a term from Kipling in objecting that sociobiology peddles "just-so stories," narratives about the evolution of a given physical or behavioral trait that construct speculative,

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fictional, and self-justifying accounts of its origin that are often unsupported, or even unsupportable, by experimental evidence ("Sociobiology" 258). Just-so stories, Gould argues, mislead us by conflating function and origin, confusing meaning and cause.⁷ For this same reason Michael Bérubé complains that sociocultural applications of Darwinism all too often conclude "that Nature herself speaks the language of Ayn Rand" (70)—that evolutionary psychology, like free-market economics, tends to affirm the existing social order as natural and the natural as desirable.⁸ To be sure, such status quo-ism is by no means universal among neo-Darwinists, but its subtle persistence as a philosophical premise sprouts up unexpectedly even when it is expressly disavowed, causing logical stumbles for those who, however unwittingly, take it as a point of departure.⁹ Thus in a broadside against contemporary theory, Joseph Carroll invokes the theodicy of Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man," in which Pope's balanced definitions and neat antitheses quietly but forcefully bring multiple *alls* together into *one*:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see,
All discord, harmony not understood,
All partial evil, universal good:
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.¹⁰ (52–53)

Indeed, the tendency of evolutionary psychology to devolve into an atheist theodicy prompts Gould's other famous literary reference: his characterization of sociobiologists as followers of Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss. He quotes Voltaire's famous optimist in order to show the fallaciousness of excessive or naive adaptationism: "Everything is made for the best purpose. Our noses were made to carry spectacles, so we have spectacles. Legs were clearly intended for breeches, and we wear them" (Gould and Lewontin 581)

Now, whether literary figures like Kipling, Pope, and Voltaire (not to mention the quasi-literary Ayn Rand) are actually needed in a debate like this may be doubted; the profusion of such allusions may indicate little more than the fact that in poems, plays, and novels, ideas are often formulated in particularly incisive ways. Scientists do tend to use literature as mere ornament rather than as a fully legitimate investigation of questions of "human nature" (Garber 28). Still, such allusions also remind us

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that the literary has always been a sphere where the most fundamental and far-reaching of existential questions have been explored. Matthew Arnold famously argued that it is precisely in the wake of Darwin's discoveries, as well as of disenchanting scientific discoveries more generally, that people have "turn[ed] to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us." Indeed, he goes so far as to argue that "Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete" (300). It is such an Arnoldian function for literature that Deirdre Coleman discerns in her contribution to this issue when she notes that, when faced with moral and emotional crisis, J. M. Coetzee's David Lurie—a literature professor relegated to teaching "Communications" (Coetzee 3) to a "postliterate" (32) student body—"draws on his literary education to interrogate what it means to be human" (Coleman 613).

The juxtaposition of Darwin and literary study, then, by exploring the often-contested intersection of scientific and humanistic discourses, at the very least holds out the promise of addressing major questions of interest to both of the so-called two cultures. Yet it is precisely the failure to fulfill this promise that prompts another critique of literary Darwinism: that it offers only the old wine of tried-and-true interpretations in the beguiling new bottles of scientific terminology.¹¹ Literary Darwinists open themselves up to criticism, if not outright parody, when they simply redescribe Jane Austen plots in terms of mate selection and kin assistance.¹² The most compelling objection to literary Darwinism, then, may not be that it is speculative (any ambitious criticism must have the freedom to speculate), or that it leads to a conservative politics (a scholarly inquiry shouldn't be avoided because one fears its results), but simply that it fails to address the most important questions that define the discipline of literary study. In the *Phaedo*, when Socrates, awaiting death, refutes Anaxagoras, he compares the older philosopher to a person who,

when he endeavored to explain the causes of my several actions in detail, went on to show that I sit here because my body is made up of bones and muscles; and my bones, as he would say, are hard and have joints which divide them, and as the bones are lifted at their joints by the contraction or relaxation of the muscles, I am able to bend my limbs, and this is why I am sitting here in a curved posture—that is what he would say, and he would have a similar explanation of my talking to you, which

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he would attribute to sound, and air, and hearing, and he would assign ten thousand other causes of the same sort, forgetting to mention the true cause, which is, that the Athenians have thought fit to condemn me. (136)

The scientific materialist explanations of muscles and bones, of sound and air (to which Socrates's leisurely elaboration satirically lends an aura of complexity), may be perfectly valid in their own domains, but they leave untouched the questions of justice raised by the stark fact of Socrates's imminent death.

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Darwin, despite his self-effacing rhetoric, did of course engage those big questions that have always occupied the poets, and he recognized that his scientific discoveries inevitably bore on human affairs. Therefore, to understand the scope of Darwin's legacy for literary studies, it is first of all essential to regard the literary not merely as belletristic ornament, nor merely as ready sociological data for investigations of patterns of human behavior,¹³ but as complex engagements with the questions—existential, ethical, sociopolitical, psychological, representational—that arise in the aftermath of revolutionary scientific discoveries. And it is precisely here that we need to discern the basic kinship of Darwin's thought with the literary theory that self-described literary Darwinists tend to reject. To some, such a recognition may appear counterintuitive: because Darwin was influenced by an English empiricist tradition running from Hobbes through Malthus and Smith to Ricardo, he is generally not linked to the body of literary theory descending from Continental thinkers like Kant and Hegel. Yet his impact on forerunners of contemporary thought such as Nietzsche, James, and Freud cannot be ignored. Keith Leslie Johnson, in his contribution to this issue, goes so far as to call Darwin the "fourth hermeneut of suspicion" (575), placing him alongside Paul Ricoeur's famous triumvirate of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as a founder of modern interpretive practices. Gillian Beer, who was probably the first, at least among modern critics, to notice Darwin's "extraordinary hermeneutic potential" (8), calls attention to his legacy as a philosopher of flux rather than the advocate of stability constructed by the literary Darwinists, who aim to eradicate interpretive play by establishing hard-and-fast natural

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categories. Or as Johnson puts it, taking a slightly different tack, if “literary applications of Darwin’s scientific theories in recent years . . . have been slow to gather supporters,” that failure

may be because, even while acknowledging the intrigue of empirical approaches, humanities types tend to share a basic intuition: that understanding Darwin’s thought (now more than ever, as the cliché goes) is perhaps more important in its ethical and, ultimately, biopolitical dimension than in its scientific or methodological one.¹⁴ (572)

Such a claim is implicitly endorsed by Laura Otis as well, when she argues that representations of the figure of the scientist in works by H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw “suggest both writers’ concern with the ethics of experimentation at a time when scientific knowledge was increasing faster than awareness of its social implications” (492–93).

As it turns out, numerous scholars—apparently working independently of one another—have begun to trace the affinities of Darwin’s thought with certain lines of contemporary literary theory. The feminist thinker Elizabeth Grosz notes that questions of origin and identity make up one of “the most complex and underdiscussed elements of Darwinism, the point where Darwin’s own account uncannily anticipates Derridean *différance*” [sic] (21). Finding meaning only in differences, in interstices, “Darwin seems to produce a quite peculiar, and thoroughly postmodern, account of origin” (23). Grosz uses her close reading of Darwin to trace a line of descent running through Nietzsche and Bergson to Deleuze and Irigaray. Meanwhile, the literary historian Louis Menand, beginning with many of the very same passages in Darwin’s *Origin*, works out an intellectual lineage that positions Darwin as a precursor of the philosophical pragmatism of Peirce, Dewey, and James—a channel of thought that eventually flows into the mainstream of American literary theory. Like Grosz, Menand notes that for Darwin the idea of the species is a contingent one. He goes on to make the pragmatist point that such contingency does not nullify the value of the concept of a species, although it does radically change it: “Darwin did not conclude that species do not exist. He only concluded that species are what they appear to be: ideas, which are provisionally useful for naming groups of interacting individuals” (123). Related insights have come from the critics Ellen Spolsky and Colin Milburn, who have in the last decade independently articulated paral-

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lels between Darwin's thought and Derrida's, with Spolsky specifically aiming to defang the threat that poststructuralist theory seems to pose for a cognitive-studies-oriented audience. Lastly, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, whose *Homo Sacer* and *The Open* have become foundational texts for discourse about the animal and the creaturely, shows that the old evolutionary pseudoproblem of the missing link between ape and human is nothing but a (Derridean) aporia, "a zone of indeterminacy" (37) created by definitional tension: "Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should exist there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision" (38).

Just as Darwin can be conceived of as a proto-postmodernist, so sociobiology can be shown to rest on some highly Derridean premises. The arch neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins defines the gene in structuralist, even deconstructive terms. He argues that the gene is best understood not as a single protein sequence (or cistron) at a single locus on a chromosome, responsible for the synthesis of a single protein chain, but as a retroactively identified "cause" of any given phenotypic effect:

The "effect" of any would-be cause can be given meaning only in terms of a comparison, even if only an implied comparison, with at least one alternative cause. It is strictly incomplete to speak of blue eyes as "the effect" of a given gene *G1*. If we say such a thing, we really imply the potential existence of at least one alternative allele, call it *G2*, and at least one alternative phenotype, *P2*, in this case, say, brown eyes.¹⁵ (*Extended* 195)

Biologists say a gene is "for" something only when a significant comparison can be made between two possible genetic variations and two possible phenotypic effects. Unless eye color varies within a population, biologists have no reason to identify a gene "for" eye color at all. For Dawkins, "phenotypic effects can always be thought of as *relative* to alternative phenotypic effects" (196; Dawkins's italics). This idea, he claims, is "a fundamental truism, of logic more than of genetics" (38). "It is simply meaningless," he argues, "to speak of an absolute, context-free, phenotypic effect of a given gene."¹⁶ As with Saussure's signifiers, there are in Dawkins's concept of the gene no positive terms, only meaningful differences within a system. Thus a genetic "cause" produces a phenotypic "effect" only by what Dawkins—with no apologies to Derrida and his famous chains of signifiers—calls "chains" of biological and chemical

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processes: “chemical chain[s] of embryonic causes” (*Selfish* 66), “long and devious chains” (*Extended* 197), “long, ramified and indirect causal chains” (198). In fact, what the word *gene* names as the cause of a phenotypic effect is not a single cistron at a single locus on a chromosome but rather the complex interaction of many cistrons: “the use of single-locus models is just a conceptual convenience” (21). A “gene” is really a combination of cistrons working in concert (or conflict), and the particular combination that one identifies as a gene depends on the phenotypic effect that one chooses to isolate. For Dawkins, “geneticists . . . always deal with *differences*.” A gene is the sum of its effects.¹⁷

Such overlooked homologies between sociobiology and literary theory may indicate the centrality of Darwin’s thought to both. The great evolutionary theorist and historian of science Ernst Mayr maintains that Darwin dispelled not only the notion of divine creation but in fact five major philosophical tenets, principles that undergirded not only religion but nineteenth-century science as well: creationism, anthropocentrism, essentialism, physicalism, and teleology (318); and in various ways the demise of each principle reverberates through contemporary thinking. The rejection of creationism still appears, in American political discourse today, as the most menacing of Darwin’s insights, and thanks to the aggressiveness of the fundamentalist Christian political agenda, antirealism is probably the “Darwinism” most visible in the US news media. But for the Victorians this was not necessarily Darwin’s most radical insight, and certainly not his only one; his other revolutions have proved at least as durable. Antiessentialist or antitypological thinking, for example, has been central not only to the political agendas of contemporary literary and cultural studies but, much more broadly, to the mainstream of twentieth-century political liberalism; Mayr, himself a signatory to the famous 1950 UNESCO statement on racism, points to antiessentialist thinking as grounds for debunking any (pseudo)scientific racism (320). Meanwhile, Darwin’s antiphysicalism contributes to a shift from the clockwork model of the Newtonian universe to a view of science based on a “probabilism” that recognizes temporal change, emergence, and stochastic processes (a newly available understanding of nature as open and dynamic that informs Omri Moses’s interpretation, in this issue, of habit in Gertrude Stein’s work). Next, by overturning anthropocentrism, Darwin strikes an irreversible blow to what Freud later calls man’s narcissistic notion of himself as holding a privileged place in the universe. This

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critique of anthropocentrism, unimaginable in its current form without Darwin, has given rise to “the burgeoning area of animal studies” (Wolfe 564), an interdisciplinary zone where political advocacy, cultural studies, Continental philosophy, ecocriticism, and biology intersect to discuss nonhuman animals and their use, representation, and theorization by human ones. Finally, Darwin’s antiteleological view of evolution—his view of the world as a continually changing work in progress—has, as George Levine argues, fundamentally reshaped the expectations that readers bring to plots and radically problematized the way that novels achieve or fail to achieve narrative resolution:

The growing nineteenth-century dissatisfactions with closure—the most marked and inevitable feature of “plotting”—are further reflections of this Darwinian movement away from teleology and . . . toward a new kind of emphasis on continuing change. (19)

Mayr’s framework, then, sketchy as it may be, offers touchstones for understanding how Darwin’s thought ramifies through twentieth-century literature, and thus why a journal taking that literature as its area of study should devote an issue to his conjunction with modern literature. For while Grosz and Menand help us to see Darwin’s impact on particular modernist-era thinkers, we can go still further and claim that Darwin makes possible modernism itself. Though it may be true that in a narrow sense the decades of modernism before the synthesis of Darwin and Mendel are marked by what has been called an “eclipse of Darwinism” (Bowler)—the prevalence of softer or more Lamarckian models of inheritance—in a broader sense the far-ranging questions opened by Darwin play out fully in various directions throughout modernist texts, and beyond them in the second half of the century. Teaching a course on the modern British novel, I cannot fail to note, for example, Cesare Lombroso’s Darwinian criminology in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, sociobiological explanations of womanly beauty in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, repeated reference to Darwin in the psychotic visions of Septimus Smith in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, invocations of Charles Lyell’s geological deep time in Forster’s *A Passage to India*, and the burning of a copy of *The Descent of Man* in the opening pages of Ivy Compton-Burnett’s *A House and its Head*. These multiple, various textual appearances of Darwin or Darwinian ideas suggest, perhaps, what I’ve argued elsewhere: that rather

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than a Darwinian understanding of culture, what is needed is a cultural understanding of Darwin, that is, of the contradictory, dynamic, and forceful significations that his name and work have assumed over the twentieth century.

§

The essays collected in this issue follow no single methodology, nor do they subordinate the field of literary criticism to experimental psychology. The works they analyze cover the chronological range of the twentieth century (and then some) from fin-de-siècle essays by W. E. B. Du Bois and T. H. Huxley to a novel of J. M. Coetzee published at the century's close. They consider literature that is lyric and satiric, realist and fantastic, argumentative and parabolic. They address issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality; and also of language, character, genre, ethics, and politics. And yet—along with the five book reviews that treat recent work on this and related topics—they coalesce into a tight cluster of common themes and ideas.

For example, almost all the essays partake of a theoretical effort to think past the timeworn nature/nurture debate. Omri Moses's discussion of Gertrude Stein emphasizes a dynamic, processual, and developmental model of evolution and situates Stein in a vitalist tradition that descends from Darwin and includes Bergson and James. This tradition discerns "a startling continuum between biology and culture" and proves particularly useful to contemporary thinking because it "contests both concepts of biological essentialism and social constructivism" (447). A key term for Moses here is *habit*, which in Stein's view—and in her practice—is a constructive force. Against orthodox neoromantic or modernist understandings of habit as deadening (akin to outworn social and aesthetic conventions), Stein's habit is a gradualist and incremental but unpredictable and lively pattern of repetition with difference, a pattern that is "not inevitable or uniform" (448). Developing at the boundary of nature and culture, the internal and external, the voluntary and the involuntary, it structures Stein's literary innovations on the level of sentence, character, narrative, and genre. Part of a nondeterministic and nonphysicalist universe, habit "is a dynamic force rather than an archive" (464). Ultimately, for Moses, Stein proves a stronger advocate for habit than even Bergson and James; she resembles more closely their teacher, Darwin himself,

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who apprehends a balance between creative and conservative functions of habit. Like Darwin, "Stein concentrates attention on microevents that reveal emergent changes from an earlier precedent" (446). Moses thus challenges accounts of evolution that rely on understanding heredity as a mere blueprint, accounts of modernism that undervalue the repetitions of habit, and accounts of Stein that condemn her attention to characters as immutable types.

The mutual implication of culture and biology likewise emerges in Laura Otis's essay, which discerns strong parallels between George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, a social comedy of class mobility, and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, a science fiction adventure about traversing the species barrier. Otis points out that Wells (a student of T. H. Huxley) saw much greater promise in science than did the ever-skeptical (and stubbornly Lamarckian) Shaw. Still, she demonstrates how in both these tales of metamorphosis, the authors indict the scientist figure for an ethical indifference to the pain caused by his will-to-knowledge, and how both narratives show experimental transformations entailing complexities beyond the scientists' anticipation or control. These parallels allow Otis to further demonstrate how, in the wake of Darwin, the discourses of class and species are of necessity interlaced: Eliza Doolittle's class transformation is represented through animal metaphors, while the rebellion of Moreau's "beast people" against their dictatorial ruler has clear sociopolitical overtones. Thus while Shaw's work is often held to be more optimistic about the possibility of social change, Otis breaks with received opinion by viewing *Pygmalion* as closer to *Moreau* in that both works attack the credibility of missionary narratives of individual rescues in which Christian charity, along with cleanliness and sobriety, are sufficient to alter human (or beastly) behavior. Although neither writer endorses laissez-faire Social Darwinism, both radically test the plasticity of social structures—indeed of the social as such. In Otis's reading, they ultimately suggest that transformation must be systemic if it is to be lasting, and that the scientist or social engineer ignores this conclusion at his peril.

Taking a slightly different angle of approach, Dana Carluccio seeks to historicize the conflict between social constructionism and biological essentialism in her examination of race in American modernism. She argues that our understanding of both modernist accounts of race and current-day debates over evolutionary psychology are incomplete if we

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fail to acknowledge the prominence of Darwinian thinking in the works of writers such as W. E. B. Du Bois and George Schuyler. For Du Bois, evolutionary thinking is not a biological reductionism but rather “a middle term” (513) between the biological and the cultural that mediates by shifting attention from essences to functions. Instead of “a set of genetically controlled and fixed traits,” race becomes “an inevitable cognitive propensity to act *as if* such traits existed.” In short, Du Bois views race as a “cognitive fiction”—an “evolved technology” (515) that serves (or has served) an adaptive function. Because it directs attention to what race does rather than what it is, a cognitive fiction “can persist independently of [its] correlation to anything outside [itself]” (517).¹⁸ Carluccio mobilizes this idea of race as a cognitive fiction in a sedulously careful reading of Schuyler’s wild satire *Black No More*. Whereas Du Bois uses the notion of (seeing) race as an evolved cognitive capacity to defend racial pluralism, the pessimistic Schuyler intimates that our evolutionary inheritance has poorly equipped our minds for a modern world vastly different from the environment to which we adapted. If race is a cognitive adaptation, Schuyler’s novel seems to imply, it is one that seems now to serve only violent or exploitive ends.

Susan McCabe’s essay on Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop finds in Darwin—whose work both poets knew deeply—possibilities rather than limitations, and in her reading he becomes a thinker far more intriguing than we see in the reductions of his ideas given to us by contemporary pop culture. Darwin proves valuable for Moore and Bishop in multiple ways: his naturalist’s eye for the distinguishing detail offers a model of poetic observation; his intellectual honesty provides an understanding of the natural world that is “unsentimental, even depersonalized” yet “filled with attractive anomalies and ‘originals’” (548); his imagination of slow, gradual change provides an analogy for the creative process; his empiricist’s gathering of samples mirrors a modernist process of poetic composition that entails the collecting and culling of literary specimens. Most of all, his scrupulous attention to variations, differences, and oddities allows Darwin to emerge as an early queer theorist who adumbrates models of mothering and sexuality that escape the dominant Freudian oedipal paradigm. Thus even though Darwin’s own writing avoids representation of motherhood, he still can offer—most strikingly in his discussions of artificial selection and the breeding of pigeons—unorthodox “scenarios of domestication” that contrast with the traditional ones that are gener-

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ally “associated with mothering and the rearing of the young” (555). The queer figures of the male mother, the dandyish fancier, the “obsessive taxonomist” (554), the student of extinct and forgotten species, and the collector of nature’s odd variations all allow for a “break from teleological sexuality” and point the way toward “thinking beyond rigid attachment to fixed or immutable forms of embodiment” (569).

Reconnecting Darwin’s insights with those of recent theory, finally, can inform the understandings of a concept increasingly visible in literary studies, the animal. The two essays that close out this volume engage the animal—or, to use the term that Eric Santner has favored, the *creaturely*¹⁹—in both the midcentury moment of the new atomic age and the post-Cold War moment of the century’s close, when the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of apartheid awakened new political hopes but also new uncertainties. Keith Leslie Johnson’s essay on T. H. Huxley and his grandson Aldous examines the younger writer’s 1948 novel *Ape and Essence* “within the problematic of post-Darwinian ethics” (584), a problematic Johnson reads with the help of Agamben’s writings on the human-animal binary. Johnson’s essay begins with T. H. Huxley’s struggle to relate the two terms in the title of his 1893 lecture, “Evolution and Ethics,” showing how his best efforts to decouple the natural world of evolutionary change from the human realm of ethics deconstructs itself, as concepts like sympathy and justice prove too slippery to function as criteria of distinction. This philosophical struggle then serves to clarify the ethical stakes in Aldous Huxley’s post-Holocaust novel, which—from its opening invocation of Gandhi’s murder to its presentation of a screenplay describing a fantasy of warring mutant eugenicist primates—thematizes the abject body as a site where sovereign power is both exercised and resisted. Ultimately, the distinctions between human, animal, and monster matter less to Aldous than the fact of the subjection of all life to power. A Darwinian understanding of life, viewed through Agamben, helps us to discern the logic of those “alienating zones of the nonhuman within the human,” zones which “become visible in apartheid, in genocide, in anti-Semitism, racism, and so forth” (589). Through a ludicrous (and often aesthetically reviled) science fiction scenario, Huxley’s fantastical screenplay-novel illumines the very real biopolitical fallout of twentieth-century social Darwinisms.

Deirdre Coleman’s essay engages a similar problematic at a later historical moment and in a radically different genre by turning to a

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contemporary novelist central to theoretical investigations of the animal, J. M. Coetzee. Coetzee has long been concerned with human beings in the condition of abjection, and his 1997–98 Tanner Lectures at Princeton, collected as *The Lives of Animals*, have become canonical texts for suggesting how literature might challenge an anthropocentric worldview. In her reading of Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, Coleman recognizes that Darwin is a necessary figure for contemporary theorizations of the creaturely. Working through multiple allusions in *Disgrace* to romantic writers, she finds in that earlier historical moment—by no accident, a moment just prior to Darwin's own writing—"a romantic dialectic . . . between a Malthusian population principle and a Godwinian drive of the species to perfect itself" (604). She argues that David Lurie, the novel's protagonist, understands postapartheid South Africa through an implicit interpretation of Darwin and Malthus (a Social Darwinism) that views political, personal, and sexual relations through a brutal calculus of biological competition among races to survive and reproduce—a competition in which women are relegated to the status of material resources. But Lurie's fear of "racial swamping" (601), tied to his "individual anxiety about evolutionary and reproductive failure" (607), gives way to an alternative reading of Darwin that recognizes continuity not only between races but between species. Lurie's favored romantic authors turn out, in this view, to be early theoreticians of the creaturely, with archetypal outcasts like Frankenstein's creature or Byron's Lara calling upon the reader for understanding and sympathy.

As Coleman's reading outlines a dichotomy of political possibilities for Darwinism, so the essays in this issue together indicate a richness and a mutlifariousness of implication to Darwin's thought that go far beyond the caricatures and slogans offered to us by today's journalism. Ernst Mayr, in the article I've quoted, notes that Darwin's ideas were "liberating" even as they "placed a new burden on modern man" (323), and he goes so far as to claim that the end of Panglossian teleology means that "If we want to have a better world it is up to us to take the necessary steps" (324). The stakes of interpreting Darwin, on this view, are high indeed. And while none of the essays collected here presumes to claim the last word on either Darwin's place in literary study or the ways in which he might point us to "a better world," taken together they all surely demonstrate that over the entire span of the twentieth century, writers have fully recognized and grappled with the freedoms and burdens that Mayr discerns.

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Working to open interpretive possibilities rather than to foreclose them, these essays together demonstrate that just as literature has taken up the complex challenges posed by Darwin, so too has literary criticism.

Notes

1. A program to resolve disciplinary differences by reinterpreting all knowledge via the methods and discourses of the natural sciences.
2. Guillory takes the term from Louis Althusser. It designates a set of philosophical positions that generates and justifies research but has become so widely accepted and reproduced that it has ceased to be philosophically questioned within a given discourse community. For Guillory, "Spontaneous philosophy is something more than common sense, if also something less than adequate philosophy" ("Sokal" 476). Elsewhere Guillory describes it as "the discourse of self-description and legitimation produced alongside practice" ("Critical Response" 528) and remarks that "self-congratulation is the worst feature of spontaneous philosophy" (530).
3. Literary Darwinism, along with the related field of cognitive literary study, was recently championed in *The New York Times* with this very cliché (Cohen). So-called cognitive approaches to literature do not necessarily assume a neo-Darwinist view, and many foundational cognitive scientists (Noam Chomsky, Jerry Fodor) strongly reject some of the premises of the Dawkins-Dennett school; still, evolutionary psychology conceives of itself as fusing sociobiology and cognitive science, and in literary studies there is much overlap between the subschools.
4. See for example Joseph Carroll's claim that "a very large proportion of the work in critical theory that has been done in the last twenty years . . . is essentially a wrong turn, a dead end, a misconceived enterprise, a repository of delusions and wasted efforts" (25). Brian Boyd, slightly less strident, writes:

The prevailing mode of literary theory in academe often calls itself simply "Theory," as if theories like those of gravity, evolution, and relativity were nugatory. . . . Capital-T theory . . . has isolated literary criticism from the rest of modern thought and alienated literary studies even from literature itself. (384)
5. For works of literary Darwinism see Carroll, Boyd, Storey, Dutton, Dis-sanayake, Barash and Barash, and Gottschall. William Flesch's *Comeuppance* is reviewed in this issue.

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6. See Easterlin, Richardson and Steen, Gottschall and Wilson, Boyd, Carroll, and Gottschall.

7. This argument is central to Gould's critique of the neo-Darwinists and tends to be grudgingly conceded. Gould notes Nietzsche's arguments for the nonequivalence of "current utility" and "causes of origin" and cites the analogy made in *The Genealogy of Morals* between the sociocultural evolution of punishment and the biological evolution of organs such as the hand or the eye (*Structure* 1214). One finds, interestingly, the exact same point made by Michel Foucault: "The eye was not always intended for contemplation, and punishment has had other purposes than setting an example" (83).

8. Except, of course, when the existing order is so plainly undesirable that it cannot be justified—in which case it is human interference with nature that is blamed.

9. For an especially vivid illustration of inadvertent status quo-ism conflicting with the author's professed liberalism, see Steven Pinker.

10. Carroll claims:

The basic poststructuralist position, inverting that of Alexander Pope, is that whatever is, is wrong. I would not agree with Pope that whatever is, is right, but I would agree even less with people who are fundamentally opposed to the very principle of normative order. (26)

Note Carroll's polemical framing of his opponents' position as radical and his own as moderate.

11. See for example Tony Jackson, who finds much to endorse in the program of reconciling literary criticism with empirically oriented cognitive disciplines, but opines: "Too often it seems that the vocabulary of cognitive rhetoric is simply being plugged into the interpretation" (173). See also William Benzon's book review in this issue:

I find [Flesch's] explication [of spite and vindictiveness] interesting, but that's not the point. Is that explication useful and illuminating, does it do more than ground those notions in biology? I'm not sure that it does. . . . Thus it's not clear to me how far his literary analysis goes beyond the complex redescription of actions in biological terms. (632–33)

12. Thus it may be that the oft-perceived antitheory bent of literary Darwinism is less a simple anti-intellectualism than an antimodernism. If, as Fredric Jameson argues, modernism made the canon in its own image (179), so that

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great works of the past (Pound's troubadours, Eliot's metaphysicals) were identified as those that achieved a kind of difficulty, complexity, or affective sophistication at odds with reigning bourgeois protocols, then modernism would aim to renounce those very aspects of reading, art, or literature that literary Darwinism seeks to explain. For it is of course the popular bourgeois forms of art—or indeed the earlier collective and oral forms of song and storytelling—whose evolution literary Darwinism must address if it would approach anything like the explanation of a species-wide universal. Thus modernism and the poststructuralist theory that in many ways derives from it would alike appear largely irrelevant if not downright perverse to literary Darwinism because they cultivate a specialized, sophisticated, highly trained readership. In this, then, literary Darwinists find company in that branch of left-leaning cultural studies that views high modernism as an elitist mystification of art and urges instead critical attention to popular forms.

13. For Gottschall's idea of literature as social science data, see D.T. Max.

14. *Biopolitical* is a coinage of Foucault's, used to refer to the subjection of life, bodies, populations, reproduction, and sexuality to political power; it is a major theme of Agamben's thought as well. Santner defines it as "the threshold where life becomes a matter of politics and politics comes to inform the very matter and materiality of life" (12).

15. An allele is an alternative form of the gene potentially occupying the same place on the chromosome.

16. As Dawkins writes in his earlier and even more famous book, *The Selfish Gene*:

No one factor, genetic or environmental, can be considered as the single "cause" of any part of a baby. All parts of a baby have a near infinite number of antecedent causes. But a *difference* between one baby and another, for example, a difference in length of leg, might easily be traced to one or a few antecedent differences, either in environment or in genes. It is *differences* which matter in the competitive struggle to survive. (37; Dawkins's italics).

17. One could trace a similar poststructuralist tendency in Daniel Dennett's deconstruction of the self, which he acknowledged to overlap with French poststructuralist descriptions. Dennett indeed gives a fine, if inadvertent, sketch of the Foucauldian theory of power when he attempts to illustrate his own view of the self. He claims that philosophers of mind tend

to treat the mind (that is to say, the brain) as the body's boss, the pilot of the ship. Falling in with this standard way of thinking, we ignore an

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important alternative: viewing the brain (and hence the mind) as one organ among many, a relatively recent usurper of control, whose functions cannot properly be understood until we see it not as the boss, but as just one more somewhat fractious servant, working to further the interests of the body that shelters and fuels it, and gives its activities meaning. This historical or evolutionary perspective reminds me of the change that has come over Oxford in the thirty years since I was a student there. It used to be that the dons were in charge, while the bursars and other bureaucrats, right up to the Vice Chancellor, acted under their guidance and at their behest. Nowadays the dons, like their counterparts on American university faculties, are more clearly in the role of employees hired by a central Administration, but from where, finally, does the University get its meaning? In evolutionary history, a similar change has crept over the administration of our bodies. Where resides the "I" who is in charge of my body? (3)

18. Cf. Boyd, who, following David Sloan Wilson, reminds us that "Evolution . . . places no premium on truth" (205). In different contexts, both perceiving and misperceiving truth can be advantageous.

19. Santner distinguishes his psychoanalytically informed approach from those whose primary aim is "to break down the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman." Rather than stressing human similarity to or solidarity with the nonhuman animal, he emphasizes instead "creaturely life as a distinctly human dimension" (18).

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Gertrude Stein's Lively Habits

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As the writer of *Three Lives*, Gertrude Stein tends to be excited by the material other novelists discard. Avoiding craftsmanlike values as well as stylishness, she goes about fashioning and then repeating crude, makeshift descriptions of people and their characters. When she has them talk, they produce an incessant and recurring palaver that most of us make our peace with in others but do not necessarily celebrate. Wyndham Lewis, no fan of Stein's, said of her work (he had read *Three Lives*), "Cut it at any point, it is the same thing; the same heavy, sticky, opaque mass all through. . . . It is mournful and monstrous, composed of dead and inanimate material. It is all fat without nerve" (59). Stein for her part simply does not accept the charge that the habits, the temperaments, the forms of decency that incline people toward their particular brand of unthinking sociability are dead. At her most confident, she seems impervious to such invective. For her, the inner movement of repetition is the very principle of liveliness: "And if this vitality [of movement within repetition] is lively enough is there in that clarity any confusion is there in that clarity any repetition?" ("Lectures in America" 292). Habit as Stein understands it is not a fixed, rigid, and permanent part of the person, and it never repeats in the same way twice. It certainly defines us, as much as anything does. But habits aren't an indication of a set character that lies beneath our behaviors. We don't have a preordained seed of personality that makes us consistent from the start. We are regular beings simply because we accumulate manners and behaviors, and because that accumulation has a history that allows us at once to recognize ourselves and to depart from ourselves.

Habits, in Stein's conception, aren't immune to change. And yet her adherence to them—her celebration of "simple firm ordinary middle class traditions . . . in a repeating, common, decent enough kind of living"

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(*Making of Americans* 34)—is calculated to affront avant-garde theories of art that promote shock as a way of jolting people from staid, conventional patterns of perception and response.¹ Stein's refusal to admit repetition's deadening qualities has tended to addle critics who see habit's positive roles—its capacity to transmit and bind elements of experience and to limber up the higher faculties—invariably mixed up with inert and conservative social functions.² Liesl Olson and Lisi Schoenbach, for instance, follow Walter Benjamin in defining habit not as a dynamic and productive response but as a regularizing one. For Benjamin, habit offers a buffer against the “shock experience [that] has become the norm” (162) of modern life and threatens to obliterate psychic stability.

Stein, for her part, accords to habit a more active range of functions. In order to understand Steinian habit as a character-shaping force capable of emotional variety, one needs to turn to an intellectual lineage that cast a wide shadow over Stein's early life. Charles Darwin is perhaps the great arbiter standing behind her conception of habit. She picks up on an undercurrent of his argument—that repetition is a useful, indeed a necessary, part of human sociality—and explores its reach and consequence. Like him, she concentrates attention on microevents that reveal emergent changes from an earlier precedent. But as we shall see, because of her own sensitivity to questions of habit—and as a result of the vitalist optic she had developed under the influence of William James, her mentor at Harvard—she picks up on a side of Darwin that rarely receives attention: his claim that repetitions are not always arbitrary but sometimes involve choice. Stein learned from Darwin that habits arise out of and modify biological systems. Importantly, his late treatise *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* is less concerned with randomly inherited physiological variations than with behaviors at the vanishing point between psychology and biology. We are accustomed to treating the majority of human choices, when they are purposeful and novel, under the rubric of culture, whence all of our intellectual strivings are focused and where we generally locate the creative potential of human lives, which are otherwise restricted by genes and environment. We reserve biology for the more deterministic undercurrent of life. But Darwin's and Stein's fascination with the dynamic relation between repetitive processes and innovation rubs out any hard-and-fast dividing line between nature and culture. Not only does this mean that they understand culture to have biological determinants, as evolutionary psychologists have been telling us for the

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last several decades. They also wish to import some of the characteristics of culture into the biological realm.

This essay will read biological discourses alongside literary and philosophical ones in order to stress the nonexclusivity of scientific models and to use humanistic frameworks to help recontextualize rather than simply apply scientific thought—and thus conceive biological concepts in a new way, as it were, in a non-native environment. Through Stein I aim to draw attention to strands of Darwin's thinking that do not feature prominently either in contemporary biological discourses or in the sociopolitical ones that initially succeeded in claiming his legacy. Indeed, her work brings us back to a moment when science was renegotiating its relations to culture and to cultural and humanistic endeavor, notoriously following in the wake of Darwin's own turbulent ideas. I will highlight in her work what appears to be a startling continuum between biology and culture that contests both concepts of biological essentialism and social constructivism. In this way I hope to carry on the task commenced by Steven Meyer of "examining the complex interweavings of writing and science in [Stein's] compositional practices" (*Irresistible Dictation* xvi).

For Stein, habit permits novel forms of attention to happen. Reiterations turn potential experiences—what we might call virtual impressions and tacit connections—into actual ones. In other words, recursive action consolidates possible behavioral responses, galvanizing or motivating them in a particular direction. This language of virtuality comes from Bergson, who, like James, wished to account for life processes through nondeterministic principles and to explain psychological phenomena by considering how thresholds of potentiality repercuss on behavior. I suggest that their vitalist collaboration might be a useful intellectual basis from which to understand her work and her relation to Darwinism. The vitalist camp shared in common an emphasis on the liveliness, malleability, and ever-changing nature of biological process. James and Bergson also used Darwinian theory as a point of entry into their own conceptual projects.³

Stein, like Darwin, is obsessed with patterns perpetuated across populations, which lay bare types of behaviors and of people, and the two start from the presumption that tendencies to similarity always coincide with processes of digressive variation. Innovation occurs as a result of small departures from previously assumed behaviors that build up over time and are the product, at least in part, of decisions carried out. Like him, she doesn't presume that type life is deterministic, even if it is broadly

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normative. Despite her provocative and sometimes dubious handling of racial stereotypes, she shows no interest in treating biology as a regulative ceiling that restricts people's fundamental capacity to change.⁴ Indeed, it is fair to say that she mounts a challenge to some of the racist orthodoxies of her time.

I will establish in some detail how Stein put ideas inspired by Darwin into operation in her early fiction, specifically in "Melanchtha," the longest and most complicated story in *Three Lives*. There she shows that long-standing habits sometimes reorder themselves when a default reaction is inadequate. By bringing to bear vitalist models of habit, which presuppose change within continuity, Stein presents a new modernist definition of character. She lays the ground for an avant-garde that sees no need to direct hostility at habituated existence. While critics deem her formal experiments in repetition to run at the expense of psychological development and even of characterization as such, Stein points attention to unpredictable deviations in response that are not necessarily the result of a conscious, deliberative subject.⁵ She aims in her early work to recast what one means by an individual by reconstructing the ensemble of forces that define it.

One way that Darwin understands animal expressions is as the product of "serviceable habits," ways in which members of a given species react to different kinds of situations. For instance, dogs stiffen, bare their teeth, and raise their head, hairs bristling, when they're in an attack mode or confronting an enemy, but sink curvaceously and flexuously when they're in a humble and affectionate frame of mind. Expressions are initiatory behaviors; they prepare an animal's reaction to a stimulus by allowing it to strike an attitude correlated to a specific bodily posture. Under Darwin's magnified attention, these responses, emotional in nature, reveal the interface between conscious or intentional activity and unconscious or innate nervous response. Some of the behaviors develop in offspring at an early age and are the result of imitative or "sympathetic" instincts. These mannerisms, at first learned, then performed "independently of the conscious will" (*Expression* 352), reveal an organism that enters into structured relationships by aligning itself with other bodies and executing a chain of interconnected responses. Expressions organize the body's sympathetic relation to other bodies.

Stein is aware that these patterns, brought about by repetition, are not inevitable or uniform. Sometimes two or more different tendencies enter

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into conflict, one pattern of expression intersecting or interfering with another, causing sequences of repetition to unravel or veer in a new direction. Stein dramatizes a struggle not only between people but between specific behaviors, habits, and preferences, some of which correlate with vying racial, sexual, and class interests. The conflicts she depicts are subject concurrently to social and biological definition.⁶ Racial groupings and class pecking orders divide the human species not just into social identities but into biologically trackable populations, though neither as a social nor a biological matter is one set of interests intrinsically superior to or more important than another. By refusing to validate any set of interests in absolute terms, Stein implies that nature is to this degree open-ended, having different levels at which it works or organizes itself. Broadly we might say that the interests of individual members of a group may compete with species interests or the priorities of the social group to which they belong, whether as regards biological perpetuation of the gene or any other indirect biological advantage.

In "Melanctha" Stein stages an encounter between two lovers with different attitudes toward respectability. She explores their conflictual sympathies and patterns of response, which constitute the edifice of their relationship and in the course of time lead to its undoing. They square off and appease each other; they disengage their own wills to various degrees. But their passions, wound around their habits and inseparable from them, allow them no easy way of satisfying qualms they have about each other.⁷ Melanctha is the daughter of a black man and a mixed-race mother, and Jeff Campbell, the narrator tells us, is "a serious, earnest, good young joyous doctor" (*Three Lives* 77), the issue of a "sweet, little, pale brown, gentle" mother and an intelligent, brown-skinned father. For some critics, Stein's biological interests as they manifest in "Melanctha" raise a troubling hint of investment in impregnable personality, especially for characters with racially prescribed traits. Daylanne English suggests that they give evidence of her attraction to eugenics; like a crowd of other critics, she treats Melanctha as a stock tragic figure in *Three Lives*, a "mulatta" whose conflictual identifications, rooted in biology, are the cause of her demise (105). In the last section of this essay, I will suggest how Stein's comic impulses create a kind of narrative interference that undercuts the suggestion of tragic determinism underlying Melanctha's character. For Stein, life itself is surprising, and biology is simply not destiny. Plainly, as one of three "lives," the narrative raises the question of how life itself enters into nar-

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rative structures and departs from them—or perhaps how narrative may be rehabilitated as a set of open-ended tendencies and variable units of organization rather than a predictable diagram. As Brian Massumi would put it, rather than putting “permutations on an overarching definitional framework” and thus pinpointing “a zero-point of stasis” (3), one needs to pay attention to the “field of emergence” (9) that defines life.⁸

Jeff Campbell continually asserts the need to be “living good and being regular” (*Three Lives* 87), dispatching these habitual clackings as accusations against Melanctha’s wandering tendencies, her “subtle movements and denials and vague distrusts” (62). His intensities are of a kind that build up slowly, and so, as he says, “I really certainly don’t ever like to get excited,” adding that “that kind of loving hard [“real, strong, hot”] does seem always to mean just getting all the time excited” (86). This slow-to-be-seduced lover continually holds forth on the value of a stable middle-class existence. He rejoices in his habits. However, it cannot be said of Melanctha that she is any less a creature of habit, though in some ways her sensibility contrasts with his: “she didn’t feel the same as he did about being good and regular in life, and not having excitements all the time” (81). She simply runs at a different speed and has different ways of processing her feelings. Melanctha has a tendency to wander and a sensibility geared to swiftness and immediacy. And yet for both, habits are proclivities and tendencies that help conduct them through an evolving relationship. For Stein, habits are never dispensable as a whole, but simply reveal themselves in different ways of disposing characters to change.

Stein follows Aristotle in granting the development and exercise of habit a character-defining function, but she refuses to raise constancy to a moral virtue.⁹ She insists on redefining morality by uncoupling it from a system of immemorial standards and showing how things ranked as good are subject to evolutionary alteration. She takes advantage of word properties that fail to secure the eternality they seem to promise. Jeff Campbell speaks of being “awful *good* and sorry” about giving Melanctha “so much trouble” with his preoccupations, with his “right way of thinking” (112; my italics). A “good” is variously an enduring, stable value and an emphatic expression, one that ever so slightly alters a fact.¹⁰ Her penchant for emphatic words like “good,” “certain / certainly,” and “real / really” focus on ritualized habits of speech, ties of a sort, whose function is not to designate a category of lasting distinction but to register changes of emphasis. Her language builds on ideals that change as the situation changes in the course of the story.

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For Stein, repetitions of thought and behavior have a capacity to disclose or reveal new shades of feeling and new thought processes along with them. To tell the story of the habitual patterns she focuses on is exceptionally difficult. They follow no sequential course, and while they direct characters' responses to each other, they do so by plastic mechanisms that can't really be specified, only beheld in the slight pivots that allow people to move from one state to another. As Jeff becomes estranged from Melanctha, he tells her how much he has learned from her about loving (the act, not the state): "like really having everything together, new things, little pieces all different. . . . You see, Melanctha, it's certainly like that *you make me been seeing*" (112; my emphasis). Though he overcomes past resistance to this "one good big feeling," he continues to suffer a mistrust of her that will not go away. The odd grammar of the sentence embeds a slight grammatical irregularity into his statement (processing language, incidentally, also entails habits vital to listening and reading, which Stein relies on to pick up deviations). Jeff has been seeing something all the while, though only at this moment does his train of ideas coalesce. He doesn't say that Melanctha makes him see something now, nor that he has been seeing something from inception. To put his assertion another way, she makes him see what he has been seeing, or she makes him into someone who has been seeing something about his relationship. Repetition allows Jeff new angles on what he knows. The perception consolidates a habit-directed process and therefore changes it. But one may also say that habit enables this critical perception to happen in the first place. Only by repeating himself—hearing himself talk the same old talk—is he in a position to feel the changes in his relationship, the alterations of mood and understanding. Events don't definitively happen till they occur multiple times.

It is true that very few novelists would find any drama in pure habit, but that is because they tend to privilege sequences in which people depart from their routines of conduct. Stein thought that conventional narrative cannot capture the inner functioning of an event because it simply reports changes—how A wakes up to a new idea, or B falls into despair, or C hastens to do some drastic action. "Narrative," she contends,

concerns itself with what is happening all the time, history concerns itself with what happens from time to time. And that is perhaps what is the matter with history and that is what is perhaps the matter with narrative. (Narration 30)

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The problem isn't that historical accounts are more exclusionary in focus than other narratives, but rather that they fall back on principles shared with all conventional narratives. By tracing "what is happening," narratives assume a trajectory of events by plotting out the components on an abstract grid line. Narrative, at least in its predictable guises, doesn't present the real time of happenings that have duration and therefore doesn't capture the transition that carries one thing into another. Like history, it is too concerned with logical sequences and ignores how actions emerge from a modification in a series of repetitive actions. While Stein thinks that narrative is in a manner inescapable, she insists on beginning again and in that way resisting teleological structures.¹¹ For Stein, consciousness doesn't spontaneously change. Our lives are not sequential but serial.

Stein's descriptions of people do not aim at essences. Habituation doesn't presume to solidify or perfect character. Nor does the gravitational direction of the repertoire of behaviors say something about the substantive prearrangement of the underlying personality. Her depictions attempt to diagram something like the syntax of a person, the odd contradictions, transitions, and repetitions that make variation possible, alongside a durable stylistic signature compatible with it. She derives from Darwin the idea that the changes living beings manifest individually or even as a species do not tend toward a specific ideal or outcome. As she recounts in *Everybody's Autobiography*, when she began as a writer, "evolution was still exciting very exciting" (249). Darwin's fundamental claim is that living creatures are adaptable. His ontology prizes what we might call plasticity in the face of changing circumstances.¹² William James clarifies what is at stake in the concept. He defines plasticity in *The Principles of Psychology* as "a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once" (1: 105). He insists from the start that a plastic trait involves change and adaptation to change, not a repetition in its pure form. Plasticity is the aspect of a thing that confers endurance. It positions anything—a trait, a body, a character, a person—between the twin dangers of unadaptability (an extreme rigidity that leaves it unfit for new circumstances) and self-dissolution (excessively rapid change). Stein, like James and Darwin, insists on a potentially endless number of incremental changes that take place within the individual as well as across populations.

Darwin's self-organizing habits

As a sophisticated reader of Darwin, Stein picks up on elements of his work that biologists tend to underrate and that expand biological definition to include more than just patterns of inheritance that reproduce fixed traits.¹³ While in many quarters Darwin is celebrated as an oracle who anticipated key insights of modern genetics, a number of his treatises take account of innovations in behavior that develop through voluntary action.¹⁴ His *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* zeroes in on physical reactions that have a somatic component but are not deterministic—and are influenced, Darwin thinks, by complex, intersecting social and psychological urgings. He examines phenomena such as blushes, trembles, and pupil dilations, which are hard to classify either as scripted, biological reactions or as unscripted, cultural ones. He recounts a story told to him of a worthy Victorian lady who, like the rest of her family, suffered from a marked propensity to blushing. At one point, while being examined by a doctor, her blush spread down her neck and onto her chest as she shed pieces of clothing. The blush followed the path of the doctor's gaze. Such sympathetic nervous events and others like them are triggered by psychological reactions, and the physiological structures of the body show themselves to be synchronized with and accountable to psychological and cultural cues, in this case the response or anticipated response of another person. The physical reactions, rarely under people's direct control, are nevertheless at the interface of biology and psychology, and they disrupt normal disciplinary alignments.

Darwin's ontology had important implications for different fields, and his way of crossing supposedly distinct spheres of organization fascinated Stein. In a letter to Robert Haas, she implies that she kept up interest in Darwin through a change of discipline:

I was at Radcliffe of course and I began specializing in science. I was awfully interested in biology but gradually it turned into philosophy and psychology. I do still think that Darwin is the great man of the period that formed my youth, and I often meditate about his expression of emotions in man and animals, aside from William James, Münsterberg and Santayana I did not work with anybody in particular. (qtd. in Bush 270)

The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals, to which she alludes,

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argues, among other things, that “some actions, which were at first performed consciously, have become through habit and association converted into reflex actions, and are now so firmly fixed and inherited, that they are performed even when not of the least use” (45). Expressions are behaviors that are reproduced over time and engrained on the nervous system. As Clive Bush suggests, “Darwin had claimed for behaviour the same kind of evolutionary pattern as he had claimed for physical characteristics” (270). It turns out that the distinction between expressive behavior and physical characteristics is not always easy to preserve in the treatise. The emotional reactions that interest Darwin have their impetus in hardwired response patterns. The book is thought to contradict his own putative refutation of Lamarck’s theory of acquired characteristics, since its thesis is that expressive actions, once subject to some degree of voluntary control and developed to cope with distinct situations, can be inherited.¹⁵ Emotional responses perceived as irrational are really holdovers—distinct survivals—of coping mechanisms that long outlast their causes. The idea has Lamarckian resonance, since it presupposes that organisms can incorporate changes over time by means of once-deliberate forms of striving.

Elizabeth Wilson, who sets out to rescue Darwin’s biological account from genetic reductionism, insists that his tenacious resistance to cordoning off cultural from biological spheres may not simply be the result of his ignorance of Mendelian genetics. According to her, Darwin insists on “reciprocally configured systems” and a “wide range of mechanisms of inheritance, transmission, and transformation” (69).¹⁶ She refers to Edwin Clarke and L. S. Jacyna, who point out that the term *sympathetic* as pertaining to a nervous system dates back to Galen and refers to forms of “rapport thought to exist between parts of the body, especially the organs, that were not anatomically connected” (Clarke and Jacyna 102). Originally, *sympathetic nervous response* alluded to unexpected lines of causation among distinct organs and among systems that appeared to have strange affinity. Wilson argues that even once the structure of the nervous system was discovered, its actions could not be entirely isolated. She shows how the neurophysiology of the nervous system, which is hardwired and involuntary, has surprising alliances with “psychological proclivities, preferences, and habits, and beyond that . . . other bodies and systems of inheritance and transmission” (74). These sympathetic responses are often unpredictable, though one may detect distinct organization in them once they manifest. She attempts to recuperate for modern biology the impli-

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cations of an older notion of inventive nervous action. Intricate systems do not act on each other in defined and highly circumscribed ways but through unexpected coordinations or "sympathetic" reactions.

What evidently interested Stein in Darwin's account was his way of coupling discrepant assertions: repetitive emotional responses have a heritable biological signature, but one that is also capable of variation. Expressions have a supple, "nervy" character. Habits are not insentient, as Wyndham Lewis would have it. Stein's prose style tracks these habits, which react in small ways to the situation around them and fan out in a constant pattern of variation. The variations Darwin has in mind are not just the arbitrary products of genetic mutation. Neither should they be seen as salutary effects of cultural intervention understood as opposed to nature. For one of the most fundamental and far-reaching consequences of Darwin's view, subsequently distorted by discourses of Social Darwinism, is that cultural systems should be conceptualized in a manner continuous with nature.¹⁷ "Nurture" is not simply a disruptive—or, as it was often thought in the period, a degenerative—force that acts on natural processes.¹⁸ Variations arise, if not quite from willed behavior, then from a singular "liveliness" in the individual organism. This inventive principle emerges at the point where numerous systems intersect, some automatic and others voluntary, some innate and others situational and alterable. In this sense Darwinian thought is much closer to Bergsonian vitalism than is often acknowledged, even arguably by Bergson himself.¹⁹ While the vital impetus or *élan vital* that Bergson posited to account for the evolutionary adaptations of living things often strike modern biologists as a fanciful metaphysical shortcut, an effort to describe a spontaneous and unmotivated adaptation, his account of evolution as the product of tensions between overlapping systems, each of which has a tendency to self-organization, fits well with at least some of Darwin's ideas.²⁰

For Darwin, nervous reflexes—habits acquired and no longer subject to will—are themselves capable of adaptive, one might even say creative, responses. Darwin's famous example is of a decapitated frog, which despite having lost cerebral control of its body is still able to wipe away an irritant such as a drop of acid on its thigh with its foot. Astonishingly, if the frog's foot is then amputated, the creature continues to make an effort to complete the act, and after trying unavailingly for a short time, it finally uses the other foot to liberate itself of the irritant. Reflex reactions are, as Darwin was well aware, never simple; undirected by cerebral mechanism and

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in the absence of consciousness or intentionality, the frog can still respond to stimuli and modify a sequence of movement. Darwin consistently seeks out neurophysiological events that do not separate discriminating action from biological mechanism. Depicting specific modifications in a train of repetitive responses, he may be said to erode the distinction between an aware, responsive organism and one passively reacting to its situation. Unconscious of what it is doing, the frog can still set in motion a modified sequence of reactions. Nature is dynamically self-directed.

An experimental episode

Before Stein wrote a word of *Three Lives*, she spent a number of her undergraduate years at Radcliffe conducting experimental research in Harvard's psychology laboratory. William James and Hugo Münsterberg, a young colleague of James's and her supervisor, were important intellectual influences, but they were not the only presiding spirits.²¹ The psychological models of habit to which Stein resorted bear special resemblance to Darwin's. Both see habit as a creative impetus toward self-organization, one that widens to include synchronies between anatomical organs and even other organisms or people. Both also consider the crossover between automatic and voluntary movement, behaviors that are partly innate and partly situation-specific.

Drawn to study the intricate role played by impulse in fashioning people's behavior, Stein created two experimental studies to gauge people's reactions by their automatic or unthinking responses to motor suggestion. The published results tend to discount any hypothesis that relies on a "secondary personality" to explain unconscious volition, targeting implicitly the French school of Pierre Janet and Jean-Martin Charcot, which associates strains of automatism with hysteria and psychological dissociation. Instead of seeing automatism as pathological, they tend to regard it as a normal element of reflexive or involuntary response. Stein and her colleague Leon M. Solomons set out, in however limited a fashion, to disprove that there is an unconscious agency determining behavior behind the scenes, an agency that requires separate explanation such as we might now find in psychoanalysis.²²

The pair employed a planchette of a type used in Ouija boards, which could be guided by the investigator. Diverting their subject's attention either by reading or conversing with him or her, they looked at his or her

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arms' tendency to movement. In "Normal Motor Automatism" (1896), they relied on each other as experimental subjects, while in Stein's solo study, "Cultivated Motor Automatism" (1898), students from Radcliffe and Harvard were recruited. These students, subject to different levels of fatigue, could be made to learn and maintain certain kinds of movements while in a distracted state. The goal in each case was to devise ways of preventing them from being "conscious" of their activities, and specifically of their motor impulse. The more distracted the students were, the greater their tendency to keep "writing."

In her subject group, Stein carefully isolated their bodies' likely predispositions to movement, uncovering, as Clive Bush argues, a complicated relation between "automatic" writing and "associative" (279) behavior. The mind absenting itself leaves a hand which still picks up movement from surrounding influences and learns to repeat it. The hand, once started, moves on its own and takes on a particular rhythm. The pen it holds has a decided tendency to curve in a certain way and to a particular shape: "the figure eight, a long curve, or an m-figure" (Stein, "Cultivated Motor Automatism" 296). And if the hand fluctuates between movements more natural to it and newly acquired tendencies, then the body can be seen to enact tensions, alternating movements that suggest a struggle as "between two themes in a musical composition" (296). These "sympathetic" nervous responses on the part of her subjects were at once capable of guidance and recalcitrant to it.²³ Though the hand can learn new patterns, it is also subject to errancy. Patterns are transmitted from one person to another through complex coordinations and disengagements, creating a vacillating field of attraction and repulsion.

In the first series of experiments, Stein and Solomons treat the mind as a human motor, capable of action without the interference of reflection or judgment.²⁴ It would seem, however, that Stein differed from Solomons on the question of whether one can truly tell habit apart from higher-level functioning.²⁵ Indeed, years later, responding to an article by a young B. F. Skinner in the *Atlantic Monthly*,²⁶ she objected to his claim that she had treated the cases in her experiment as purely automatic writing—as rote, unthinking physical responses to stimuli.²⁷ A kind of "xtra [sic] consciousness—excess" (qtd. in Meyer, "Writing Psychology Over" 141), she thought, crept into the display of habits.²⁸ The mind absenting itself still leaves a remainder, a form of consciousness that crops up in the interstices of distracted attention (Stein and Solomons 506). At one point

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in the experiment they describe consciousness as “extra personal,” blurring the distinction between the body’s own impetus and an influence that comes from without (494).

The continuum Stein insisted on between conscious and unconscious, creative and automatic response, betrays telltale vitalist preoccupations. The small-scale innovations in habits—or as Stein at one point calls them, innervations—coincide with relatively stable patterns.²⁹ In *The Principles of Psychology* James considers habit to be an “equilibrium point” in a plastic structure of change.³⁰ Habits are adaptive, forms of autoregulation, orchestrations of undirected dispositions that happen on the level of the body—or between bodies, for in many respects habits are social assemblages. They emerge through social interactions, and they regulate social life.³¹ If habits are incapable of putting a lock on the pattern, as I have suggested, they are also incapable of regulating and circumscribing the degree of deviation from it. At the intersection between nature and culture, habits don’t exhaustively determine behavior, and they shift the biological focus onto matters of inclination, where an agent can maneuver among an indeterminate number of different directions. Each potential inclination or tendency is equally “natural.” Nature may regulate life, but also unregulates it. Biology doesn’t put a fundamental limit on the capacity for inventiveness, and as regards habit, works in combination with choice.

The habitual unconscious

In *Three Lives*, begun some seven years after the publication of her second experiment, Stein assembles characters defined by their habits. But rather than indicating the fixity of temperament, she seems to understand their dispositions and distinguishing forms of personal preference as a collection of evolving tendencies, sometimes in conflict with each other, hence able to link up in diverse ways. These tendencies are amplified differently in different situations. With a nod to Darwin, she examines modifications of character-forming behavior ensuing sympathetic interactions or conflicts between people.

The repetitiousness of the prose in “Melanctha” mirrors the patterns and forms that habits acquire as they develop over time, as they gather duration and move in a progressive direction. Stein’s nonstandard use of the present progressive tense also encourages the sense of ongoing time.

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Habits are constantly modified in the novel by present circumstances—by the exercise of will in characters or, more remarkably, by an unconscious shift effected in them. It is as though habit itself—the feeling of constraint and orderliness—is manifold, and made up of complex parts. These parts incessantly reorganize into new patterns. “Every day now,” we are told, “Jeff seemed to be coming nearer, to be really loving”:

Every day now, Melanctha poured it all out to him, with more freedom. . . . More and more every day now they seemed to know more really, what it was each other one was always feeling. More and more now every day Jeff found in himself, he felt more trusting. More and more every day now, he did not think anything in words about what he was always doing. Every day now more and more Melanctha would let out to Jeff her real, strong feeling. (109)

Melanctha and Jeff find ways to love each other for a time, though each stands in an anxious and somewhat compromised relation to the other's values. The phrase “more and more” captures the additive nature of events. Jeff is consistent not because he is identical with his past self but because his changes add to the attitudes and habits of mind that came before. His present self is constantly more than it was before, and this “more” is just the accretions of the past. Nevertheless, character is not simply aggregative. There is an opposed movement or tendency toward subtraction. All of Melanctha's ways of “forgetting” what she owes, what she has done, and what she feels are instances of a character by subtraction.

The additive and the subtractive movements combine to create a third: the recombinatorial. Repetitions in Stein are, as I mentioned, never exact replications of the past. Having once commenced, they diverge in numerous directions. The relation between “more and more” and “every day” in the preceding passage is variable. These phrases are also joined to new descriptions of a situation. Repetitions in Stein tend to split apart; individual sequences attach themselves to bits that were once free of them. Certain salient points modulate into other series as the point is prolonged in different directions with respect to other points. The departures that characters make from their customary repertoire of reactions do not come out of nowhere. They may be unprecedented, but they emerge as actions from a modification in a series of repetitive actions.

Attitudes in Stein tend, then, to accumulate up to a point and then

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begin shifting course as people are left to react to their situations. Stein's frequently contradictory statements about her characters underscore not their inconsistency but their plasticity. For instance, the narrator remarks of Melanctha that she

never really lost her sense that it was Jane Harden who had taught her [world wisdom], but Jane did many things that Melanctha now no longer needed. And then, too, Melanctha never could remember right when it came to what she had done and what had happened. (74–75)

In the next paragraph, Stein's narrator effectively reverses course:

Melanctha began now to feel that she had always had world wisdom. She really knew of course, that it was Jane who had taught her, but all that began to be covered over by the trouble between them, that was now always getting stronger. (75)

Why does the narrator write “never” if it is so readily contradicted? Stein depicts Melanctha as apt to judge her past by what is immediately going on around her. Even so, the narrator arguably doesn't enter into perfect contradiction. Unconsciously Melanctha still knows her debt of gratitude to Jane. It is registered in feelings and habits of thought that, apart from any explicit sense that Melanctha has about herself, keep a running tally of her experience and help direct her choices.

Habit, as Henri Bergson understands it, is a form of memory created by repetition, one different in kind from the memory that records singular events, which are, as it were, stamped with a date and time. The former is like a lesson learned over a long period; it is “lived and acted, rather than represented” (*Matter and Memory* 81). In a habit, successive phases melt into each other as the movement or thought process becomes rote. It is still a memory, but one lodged in the body rather than recollected in the mind in the form of distinct images. Bergson was in fashion in Paris during the period when Stein was writing *Three Lives*, and his theories were from the earliest period of her public notice employed to explain her writing.³² Mabel Dodge, Stein's friend and compeer émigrée, wrote a review in 1913 of Stein's experimental writing, describing “perceptions, conditions, and states of being, never before quite consciously experienced” which she associated with Bergson's theory of intuition (28).

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Bergson's work, together with James's, offers an illuminating foundation from which to understand Stein's presentation of habit. James sees habit as a groove or mental pathway of sequentially organized responses, and Bergson sees it as a pattern of reaction. Both see it as a genetic registry of movements or potential movements. While Bergson held habit in even less esteem than James did, both of their conceptions of psychic life reluctantly require it as a key compass point of experience. Stein, for her part, contested whatever stress they may have placed on its inertness, thus disentangling certain antinomies implicit in their conceptions.

By linking Bergson to James, I wish to do more than acknowledge the related perspectives and historical ties that bound their legacies together.³³ Most of the critics, Olson and Schoenbach included, who have examined the connection between Stein and James have done so under the banner of pragmatist philosophy, part of a general trend that Steven Meyer has pointed out (*Irresistible Dictation* xix). They have not generally used the vitalist context to describe her preoccupations—or James's either, for that matter.³⁴ Meyer, for his part, argues for the independent interest of James's psychology and his "radical empiricism"—crucial, he thinks, for understanding Stein's experimental impulses—though for philosophical reasons associated with his understanding of organic form, he does not connect James's late writings with vitalism (*Irresistible Dictation* 56). But by privileging a vitalist framework, we may be in a position to see how much Stein's ideas concern something beyond pragmatist social policy. Stein's well-known interest in repetition and time, along with her early fascination with Darwin, point in the direction of nonmechanistic "life" philosophies and an interest in the nature of psychic change.

For Bergson, habit is a kind of physical or mental disposition to act, but it doesn't necessarily require a corresponding mental image. It retains the past in the form of an inclination to do something. To this degree, it combines various conscious memories into something automatic which is not necessarily conscious. Stein's writing brings to the foreground certain ambiguities in Bergson's conception of habit. Like Darwin before her, Stein prefers to underscore the continuity between the unconscious and conscious activity of habit, or else to dissolve the distinction. For her, habit isn't entirely unconscious or automatic, since it is amenable to the purposive exertions of will and can integrate changes within it. And yet habit manages to retain aspects of the past in ways that people in conscious life

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cannot necessarily grasp or represent to themselves, at least not cognitively.

James calls habit "the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent" (*Principles of Psychology* 1: 120). For Bergson too, habit is a petrified and lower function of the mind. It has an uncertain status born of its intermediary position between memory and perception. Without habit, perception is not possible. It allows one to digest and absorb the overwhelming data of experience by matching the images one takes in with memories of images from the past. But to the degree that one's perceptions are overwhelmed by habit, new experiences are assimilated into ready-made responses. Bergson and James imply, then, that in some way habit impoverishes one's daily life by treating the present as a mere instance of the past, thereby expressing an arrested development:

like every habitual bodily exercise, it is stored up in a mechanism which is set in motion as a whole by an initial impulse, in a closed system of automatic movements which succeed each other in the same order and, together, take the same length of time. (*Matter and Memory* 80)

Habit would seem from this angle to admit new material rarely, and then only on the impact of stimuli that remain on its fringes. These are minor shocks of experience left undigested.

But Bergson does not stay wholly within this static view. Habit on his account is capable, for instance, of reconnecting diverse bodily memories, guiding one's choice on a more or less contracted plain of mental functioning. Habit "demands first a decomposition and then a recomposition of the whole action" (80) and in the process would seem to reorganize itself every time a person receives new perceptions. What goes by the name of habit is only one part of a multiply jointed process in which the details of our senses are ordered. Objects are recognized and tied to a memorial precedent, and the past is made use of in the present. The body navigates objects by sweeping them up into patterns of engagement and movement. Sensations that are not yet organized or methodically integrated into our perceptual schema are constantly being inputted, and they solicit new actions on the part of the body and petition it to make decisions.

Habits are necessary to higher functioning and creative activity. If one subtracts from the perception of an object the habit that allows the object to be recognized and therefore positioned in a context, one is left only with fugitive sensations and potentialities that overwhelm the

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body's capacity to act. Without habit, objects have no way of slotting themselves into place in a form that the body understands. Habit is thus an assimilative process that makes a sensation and the potentiality it opens up meaningful or useful.³⁵ In the following sense, then, habit is in an open circuit with perception: its recognitions continually heighten or extend a person's capacity for thinking and perceiving, and the resulting thoughts and perceptions eventually enter into the habit mill. Habit conserves innovation. As James says, habits "fund and capitalize" (*Principles of Psychology* 1:122) our investments in the world. By this metaphor we may conclude that it produces more than it starts out with. This is why it is misleading to imply, as both Bergson and James sometimes do, that in initiating regular sequences and pursuing a chain of reactions, habit puts a stop to choice. It might just as well be said that it prevents us from straying into the blind alleys of a decision-making process and additionally integrates new impulses into our routine actions.

Stein, as I have indicated, celebrates the constitutive impurity of habits. For her, they aren't straight repetitions, and they don't exist apart from the perceptions that redirect them. To the degree that habit stores elements of the past, it is for her a kind of unconscious routine, but the unconscious is not a deep structure underlying characters that voids their superficial inconsistency. She recounts humorously and offhandedly in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that James thought she "never had subconscious reactions" (79). Habits exist at the intersection between the past and the present. They may spawn mysterious behaviors, but only because they compress and blend many once-distinct tendencies. They are the result of long, multifaceted histories. They translate memories into movements and so are a practical engine of the unconscious, but they aren't coded messages or indications of repressed desires sent out from the psyche that require hermeneutic analysis. Rather than prompting us to peer into characters, Stein would have us witness the way people go about extending themselves in their situation, how they feel themselves modified by the occasion. To announce an attitude over and over again is to feel it change and accumulate duration.

Despite the small alterations of routine that Stein highlights in "Melanctha"—the lovers' fluid turnings toward and turnings away from each other—the larger story raises questions about the inexorable deterioration of the couple's relationship. Eventually Jeff comes to be on bad terms with Melanctha. In the process, Stein casts the two in a debate about

the nature of their commitment and consistency. Are we to understand the ending of their relationship, the separation, as fated from the start, since the characters stand for ill-assorted types? Jeff accuses Melantha of always failing to remember her love, and Melantha rejoins that "real feeling every moment when its [sic] needed . . . does seem to me like real remembering" (128). The couple's long-standing dispute about memory is at the heart of their respective conceptions of consistency. Stein, however, doesn't privilege one above the other. Both have habits of mind that, as she keeps showing us, maintain a form of memory rooted in disposition and feeling, whether conscious or unconscious. From Jeff's point of view, Melantha's habits of restiveness leave no room for anything that isn't bound to impulse, to what is immediate, direct, and urgent. On the other hand, he lays claim to the kind of memory that Bergson calls a memory image. It is associated with an intellectual removal from the world of everyday responses. He lauds a life lived deliberately, while she feels no need to square her habits with her representations of herself. Yet his precious memory and the feelings that surround it are, like hers, subject to a degree of automatism. Impulse and the will that drives it intertwine with habit. It may be true that the outcome of his relationship is to a degree predictable once Jeff and Melantha show themselves to persist along a certain course, but simply to notice the large-scale uniformity of disposition over time is, for Stein, to take away all the drama of change—the gradual augmentations and revisions of feeling. To see constancy across time is to impress upon the situation an artificial focus. The author emphasizes continuity over abstract sameness.

The long aggregating process leaves Jeff wondering how it has come to happen that he has to ask Melantha if she has time to see him, and soon after that, they part ways. Their willful compulsions and quarrels have made their relationship the stuff of slow defeat. As I have suggested, habit is a recording and playing instrument of the unconscious. It is a dynamic force rather than an archive, and one in many ways continuous with conscious life. It is therefore not the frozen, submerged mass of an iceberg that Freud imagined lurking unexposed to climatic change. Though Stein lived to see the increasing dominance of Freud's conceptual enterprise, *Three Lives*, composed well before the influence of psychoanalysis spread abroad, engaged what I've been calling vitalist ideas.³⁶ Vitalism offered a more action-oriented conception of nondeliberate processes than did psychoanalysis as it came to be known. For psychoanalysis considered

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the unconscious a repository of irrational beliefs and repressed wishes that needed penetrating interpretation to access. Vitalism is often used derisively to label metaphysicians who assume the existence of an extraphysical vital force that is without any defeasible explanatory power; it might more properly indicate figures like Bergson and James, whose conceptual models are based on changeable living systems and who give primacy to dwelling in the world and experiencing it in action rather than intellectual ways of cognizing or interpreting it.

The comedy of life and the fatalistic narrative

Below I suggest how this description of habit influenced the representation of types in "Melanctha." It is clear that Stein's character portraits draw in some manner on period stereotypes, raising the question of whether the racial interpretations she brings to bear in novelistic form overwrite the emphasis on change otherwise manifest in her work. Her racial typology seems at first blush to define the psychological characteristics of African Americans as rigid and ingrained. I argue that while social habits can force racialized bodies to conform, nature permits deviations from normative restrictions. Though Stein relies on racist clichés, her types are fundamentally not unchanging constructs. She sees the habits that underwrite them as, in essence, "lively."

Stein explores this liveliness through the literary form of comedy. While her brand of naturalist fiction plays with tragic pathos, it evokes an emotional constellation quite different from that of fatal grief, pity, or fear. It is true that the trajectory toward death in the "Melanctha" section, as in other sections of the novel on servants of the working class, draws attention to the fatalistic trajectory of the narrative. But Stein's use of subtle comic effects allows for a disruption, hindrance, or reversal that prevents comic bodies from simply playing out a tragic script, especially one that defines them by a flaw in the self. Stein's characters, beset by certain petrified habits, reveal strange forms of autonomy or esprit erupting out of an otherwise conditioned life. As Bergson sees it, comedy as a literary form spins off endless permutations on a rote pattern only to reclaim surprising moments of animation. His theory of comedy is finally, I suggest, a useful cynosure for thinking about the relation between repetition and novelty that characterizes the entire living world.

"Melanctha," as we've seen, is about a black woman of mixed-race

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heritage whose courtship with various men, both black and white, fails to lead her to the safety and refuge she both craves and resists. Her ostensibly tragic nature comes of her resistance to receiving the “good advice and serious kindness” of men distinguished by “intelligence and sympathetic feeling” (69). Early in the story she wanders among the porters at the train tracks “who often told her exciting things that had happened” to them, but while she respects them, a “big, serious, melancholy, light brown porter” in particular, “she could never let [his advice] help her or affect her to change the ways that always made her keep herself in trouble.” Stein here flirts with a stereotypical and highly schematized ambivalence associated with mulatta characters, an identification with people who are intelligent and salubrious (linked to their white nature) counteracted by a seed of racial intransigence—or worse, degeneration—that prevents them from thriving.

In Stein’s hands, however, that predictable structure is pushed to a paradoxical point. The novel refuses to let its eponymous character slope toward a fated exhaustion or abjection. In other words, Stein declines to see repetition as a sign of a defect that unmasters the self, renders it more vulnerable to external impingements. But neither does she privilege the alternative narrative trajectory, the teleology mandated by the *bildungsroman*, which aims at human enlargement and maturation. The central mulatta figure may be, like others of her kind, a woman who straddles various arenas of social life and is therefore a symbolic instance of betweenness. In the first place, she is not a character especially marked by racial ambivalence. Melanctha is no programmatic venturer into illicit sexual territory. It is worth noting that her principal relationships are with black men. In the second place, recalcitrance doesn’t prove her inability to change, but exactly the reverse: the fixity of her character, by virtue of its very immobility and its defiance of hygienic logic, exposes her to new varieties of experience. Despite a number of assumptions, then, about the prevailing style or tendency of the race, Stein pays attention to small departures of outcome or tendency that modify conventional typologies and for her define all of human life.³⁷

The story does not correlate autonomy with knowledge but plays instead on the friction between Melanctha’s desired safety and her intrepidity. Characters in Stein’s novel often exercise personal power—a capacity to act or insist—in advance of their attaining knowledge. Melanctha’s

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father intervenes when he suspects John, the Bishop's coachman, of having sexual designs on his young daughter:

Now when her father began fiercely to assail her, she did not really know what it was that he was so furious to force from her. In every way that he could think of in his anger, he tried to make her say a thing she did not really know. She held out and never answered anything he asked her, for Melanctha had break-neck courage. (66)

Melanctha remains evasive as a perpetual strategy for averting her own self-exposure, a fact captured compellingly in the claim that in her wanderings she "strayed and stood" (67). Her fixity—her repetitive nature—is necessary as an instrument of her self-extension.

Stein undercuts the expectation of failure by preventing pathos from being the guiding, sentimental formula of the story. Despite repeating that Melanctha is "awful blue" (167), the novel does not allow her to succumb to suicide. Indeed, the relentless obstinacy and inelasticity both of her character and Jeff's are pushed to the point of exaggeration. Their deportment creates, if anything, a kind of distance from their plight, a peculiar absence of feeling for them, which Bergson thinks is specific to comedy. "Indifference," he remarks in *Laughter*, "is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion" (63). Stein's repetitions can be terrifically boring, but even this has a faintly comic side to it. What passes as dialogue—the tottering syntax, malapropisms, and heaping asseverations—add equivocal buoyancy to the characterizations. The liability to fault—and the relentless script into which they are placed—typifies them. Stein's descriptions paint them in broad strokes, using the familiar language of everyday expression, roundabout descriptions that fit like an oversized costume. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein recalls her delight in "misfit clothes instead of the old classic costume" of the Cirque Médrano, which she visited weekly for a time. This outsized covering, which itself reminded her of Charlie Chaplin's outfits, offers an analogue in physical comedy for the moral "ragging" in "Melanctha." Indeed, Susan McCabe links Chaplin's spasmodic body—reflex action nervously playing itself out—with Stein's narrative propulsion that relapses, reverberates, in an endless comic circumnavigation (437).³⁸ The couple may be said to flop around in their dialogue, and their vaudevillian back and forth bears some resemblance to a Punch-and-Judy show. Though it has not often

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been noted, even their behavior has a slapstick quality to it. Think of Jeff digesting his impressions of Melanctha's quality of mind: "He was very friendly with her in his laughing, and then he made his face get serious, and he rubbed his head to help him in his thinking. 'I know Miss Melanctha' he began" (84), and then he proceeds with his relentless anatomy of Melanctha to Melanctha.³⁹ Her rigid sensibility and the unsociable ends to which it leads her convey a quality, if not quite droll, then remote and unserious.

There is something almost comical as well about making Jeff Campbell, a figure who prides himself on his self-possession, unravel so completely while still insisting on the need to be "living regular." He too is a mulatto figure, albeit one who recovers the calmness he values in the story. Though we are told that "Jeff Campbell never could forget the sweetness in Melanctha Herbert," he trails off and out of the narrative as he recovers his strength and as the intensity of his attachment wanes. The promise of reversibility of fortunes sets the terms for Melanctha's sexual adventures.

The conversations between Melanctha and Jeff, their constant squabbles and clashes, seem to emerge out of something almost automatic within them, out of some reserve of their moral makeup. Stein's bemused representation stages a collision between the material gravity and the moral gravitas of their nature. In *Laughter* Bergson defines comedy as a "kind of *absentmindedness* on the part of life" (117), an improper but not very serious distance from life's contingencies. The "laughable element," he remarks, often consists of "a certain *mechanical inelasticity*, just where one would expect to find the wideawake adaptability and the living pliability of the human being" (67). Comedy constructs people not as individuals but as ready-made iterations: "Every comic character is a type" (156). But character comedy, which conjures up a dangerous automatism in personality, never strays very far from its opposite, an impression of suppleness and dexterity. A funny expression makes us think of "something rigid" in the "wonted mobility of the face," the cause of which is a "habit that has been contracted and maintained" (76). For Bergson as for Stein, the living throb or vibration is always ambiguously caught between a purely mechanical or formulaic existence and a perpetually mobile life.

Unfortunately, the antinomies Bergson identifies are themselves excessively rigid. Laughter, he thinks, is an all-too-human way of correcting the outward-seeming display of mechanism in the body. Comedy, on his account, points at a pathology, an incapacity to adapt, and laughter

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is a way of healing a threatened inelasticity of character. In *Laughter* (a relatively early work), Bergson goes to some lengths to sever matter from life and to sever the life of the lower animals (shrunken and diminished by habits) from the life of people. In his conservative account, laughter inoculates life to its pathogenic susceptibility to unyielding matter.⁴⁰ It is a uniquely human response, one that can call up the unparalleled capacity for transformation and variation. Bergson presents life in its pure form as "evolution in time . . . a being ever growing older; it never goes backwards and never repeats itself" (118), while comedy arrives on scene only to denote a stumbling block or obstruction. He adheres throughout to the formula that comedy is "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (84) and therefore merely an outward vesture, a façade behind which may be detected a lithe and mobile inward stimulus.

Bergson's case is rather sentimentally overstated on the whole. He deems habits to be only a diminishment of life or a flight from it, even though, as Darwin makes clear, life exists nowhere without them. The living world is full of echoes and duplications, which give stability to living structures. Life wouldn't be possible without some degree of rigidity and transposability, which one may associate with repetitive mechanisms. In his later work Bergson increasingly comes to appreciate the continuity between life and matter.⁴¹ Yet even in his treatise on laughter, one has to wonder why the body so persistently inclines to repetition and error and revisits its own obstinate and resistant materiality.

The body is an apparatus that prepares and perpetuates certain processes and movements held in common among all people with similar corporeal structures. Bergson pictures healthy society as a tissue of singular and highly adaptable individuals capable of giving continuous attention to life, but there are indications that such elasticity cannot sustain itself without repetition. He claims that "Our laughter is always the laughter of a group"; "You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others" (64). Bergson aligns sociability with the subterranean wellsprings of habit that fashion us into types and side us with the interchangeable and reversible inclinations of the material world. The unseriousness of comedy gives a glimpse of something very real in life: a capacity to suspend or reverse the fatalistic accession to death. The rigid habits displayed by comic expression do not necessarily display "sickness and infirmity" but the playful collision of competing tendencies in life.⁴² Human life is suffused with repetition, sometimes applied in a merely

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mechanical, disharmonious way, at other times maintaining efficacious routines. Sympathy, a feeling held in common among humans and social animals, is, Darwin maintains, "much strengthened by exercise or habit" (*Descent of Man* 681). Rather than separating life from matter, comedy, it would seem, resurrects for us, the living, the savor of our thingly origins. Perhaps, then, laughter does not separate us from our animal brethren but rather reminds us in a distinctively human way of our animal origins. It may be a special kind of awareness, but not a wholly separate kind of being.⁴³

Though Melanctha's story has a roughly circular structure, in that it concludes by returning to her failed friendship with Rose Herbert, it does not imply a narrative of irresistible momentum whose end is simply contained in its beginnings. Stein carefully refuses to complete the circle. Melanctha dies by means of a perfunctory telescopic narrative. Though she thinks about suicide and even gets ill, we are informed mere moments from the finish that she "went into the hospital where they took good care of her and cured her" (167). Stein's careless and comic contempt of novelistic convention reveals itself here. It is aimed at disrupting the predictable narrative declension itself, and the supposition behind it that characters must succumb to a fate provided for them by their racial or typological guiding trait. The momentary reversibility of the series reveals a lively interference in the fatalistic progression.

The imperturbable matter-of-factness about Melanctha's lightning-quick offing only a paragraph later doesn't change the fundamental exposition:

Melanctha went back to the hospital, and there the Doctor told her she had the consumption, and before long she would surely die. They sent her where she would be taken care of, a home for poor consumptives, and there Melanctha stayed until she died.
(167)

Life, Stein's narrative seems to confide, is relentlessly repetitive; it might even partake of the brittleness of mechanism. Indeed, the one absolutely knowable aspect of life is that it leads to death; its organic machinery is impermanent. But life has an elusive ontology, and repetition is not inimical to adaptation. It might very well be necessary to it. There is no obvious prescription for what is detrimental to life. The only thing clear is that character as a living substrate offers a delay on the way to self-

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dissolution, a dilatory moment of homeostasis. Stein undercuts the purely conservative impulse to eliminate the character who troubles the dogged separations of social life.

Here Stein may be said to make an original return to Darwin, who thinks that tendencies to variation coexist with niches of stability in the evolutionary line. While Bergson emphasizes unceasing change, the throbs of constant variation thumping through all things, making an enemy of any repetition that doesn't recrudescence, Darwin's evolutionary conception avoids programmatic judgments about the value or inevitability of self-transformation. He is content to observe intermissions and survivals from previous moments of evolutionary development and recognizes the productive—because sustaining—function of repetition. This is true not simply in such a case as the cockroach, which, as the notion goes, is poised to outlast a nuclear holocaust, but also in the behaviors and expressions of complex organisms. The dogs that fill the pages of *The Expression of the Emotions*, with their intelligible caresses, their bristling and barking, their eccentric scratching behavior (behavioral holdovers from their grass-dwelling ancestors) have social rituals in common with our kerfuffles and our yappings. To the degree that human language operates like the variety of animal expressions that Darwin explores, its vocal signs accompany a state of mind and embody it, rather than merely reporting on it: "Man not only uses inarticulate cries, gestures, and expressions, but has invented articulate language, if, indeed, the word *invented* can be applied to a process, completed by innumerable steps, half-consciously made" (*Expression* 63). Language too, Darwin would seem to suggest, begins as a habitual process of self-organization, a means of entering into sympathetic response networks.

Darwin gives vitality to vitalistic concepts and helps us understand the foundations and the distinctiveness of Stein's preoccupation with habits. For Darwin, organisms don't stand in the isolation of a predetermining genetic code. Heredity is not fate. Adaptability in higher organisms involves will, choice, and risk, but also unconscious self-organization. Most readings of Stein assume that her types spring from limitation, that they are a concession to determined lives. I have suggested, however, that they are based on routines and inheritances that are lively. These habits, as we see throughout her writing, are in evidence in characters' simplest reflexes and in their most complex intellectual tendencies. We might say that there is a dumbness—an unconscious repetitive force—in their most lively and

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vital acts of intelligent adaptation, but also that there is an intelligence (Bergson would call it *élan vital*) in their most rote, most confirmed, and most regular of daily actions.

Notes

1. Lisi Schoenbach argues that Stein situates herself in opposition to a bellicose shock aesthetic whose claim to iconoclasm or originality is based on heroic opposition to convention. Stein, she thinks, establishes a pragmatic stream of modernism, producing work committed to “gradualism, accretion, continuity, and recontextualization” (240).
2. Liesl Olson thinks that while habits prevent psychic trauma, they do so at the cost of concealing from individuals the suffocating uncertainty and violence occurring around them: “habits, as defense, . . . enable a dangerous blindness to what, especially in retrospect, demanded action” (350). Habit would seem to prevent people from engaging in political resistance or assuming wider political agency. Because she understands it as a kind of pleasure principle—the sensuous enjoyment in maintaining constancy and resisting change—she is forced to jettison the conception of habit defined “in terms of productive action” (330). Lisi Schoenbach thinks habits “create an environment in which innovations can take place” (254) but tends to see their capacity to transmit important, sometimes unconscious, collective customs and dispositions of national life in a state of “push and pull” with the perceptive capacities of the mind, which alone distinguish novelty. Both Olson and Schoenbach think habits threaten the deadening of feeling and mindless, servile reproduction of behavioral response geared to the ideological interests of the Vichy occupier and the social engineer.
3. Bergson, for instance, engaged Darwin explicitly and at length in his most famous book, *Creative Evolution*, while James consistently used Darwin as a reference point and wrote early reviews of his work. See James, *Works* 231.
4. Critics have debated the relative balance of progressivist politics and racial determinism in Stein’s presentation of race. A great deal of critical ink has been spilled on the question of how the three portraits, and especially “Melantha,” exploit or finesse racist modes of typologizing. Critics who see Stein in some form or another as racist include Richard Bridgman, Sonia Saldivar-Hull, Milton Cohen, and Laura Doyle. Paul Peppis, who emphasizes the inconclusiveness of the text’s approach to race, puts the matter this way: “Yet while the progressive model promises growth and liberation from determinism, the novella treats it as ambiguously as the determinist model it opposes” (387). A

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number of critics emphasize the difficulty of mapping Stein's political views and give reasons that include the shifting vocabulary of racial description over the course of the novella; the use of elaborate masking techniques; the strange discrepancies between narrative voice and authorial perspective; and the complicated combinations of blood inheritance, white upbringing, and social identifications with race. See Corinne E. Blackmer and Jamie Hoovey.

5. Ann Charters, for instance, claims that Stein does away with psychological development: her method of composition "is also a reflection of her view of human character as static and unchanging, basically falling into one of two types, either aggressive or passive" (xiv).

6. Obviously some human groupings are more provisional and less universal than others across the spectrum of human societies, and biologists and anthropologists argue about the merits of treating race as a useful biological category. If, however, we don't treat social and biological definitions as radically distinct, then perhaps we can agree that even historically limited ways that people find to categorize each other have biological effects on such things as mating patterns and resource allocations. Darwin, for his part, thought that racial variation is, in evolutionary terms, the product of differentiated tastes or sexual preferences within the human species. See especially "On the Races of Man" in *The Descent of Man*.

7. Much of the discourse about the passions, since the earliest theorizing about them, has downplayed their connection to habits. It is true that habits, like passions, involve longstanding dispositions, but passions tend to erupt in "episodic moments of vehement feeling," as Philip Fisher notes (23–24). He argues that reliance on momentary experience, singular and often quite unprecedented, is what makes vehement passion distinctive and also makes literature central to the examination of it (22). In other respects, as Stein was certainly aware, habits overlap with passions. Neither of them renders one's actions quite involuntary, but in both cases one is being acted upon. This, indeed, is the etymological implication of *passion*. Stein makes a firm connection between habits and passions because she regards any state to be in moving relation to the states that came before it. The same mental dispositions that are formed by habits also allow us to see passionate departures from them; continuity works in concert with difference. Stein obviously insists that literature extend the scale in which it is willing to treat passionate experience.

8. Massumi is among the most trenchant critical voices today arguing for the "mutual involvement" and "dynamic unity" of nature and culture. His arguments are consistent with some of the vitalist implications of Darwinism:

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The point is that the “natural” and the “cultural” feed forward and back into each other. They relay each other to such an extent that the distinction cannot be maintained in any strict sense. It is necessary to theorize a nature-culture continuum. (11)

9. Aristotle ranks habit as a “state of character” (1106a) whose virtue lies in its claim to being “firm and unchangeable” (1105a). His account reveals how much a particular interpretation of habit determines the models of character that one settles on. Stein too focuses on habit’s practical nature, which involves more than just knowing what should be done but actually doing it frequently and consistently.

10. Stein amuses herself with ordinary words that play on the distinction between durable designations and differences of stress. In her essay “Portraits and Repetitions” she dismisses repetition conceived as an exact reproduction: “Is there repetition or is there insistence. I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition” (“Lectures in America” 288).

11. Narrative, Stein says, “is a thing that has to be done since any one since every one inevitably has to tell something” (*Narration* 31), but she distinguishes the repetitive act of telling, the narration that is the source of her interest, from the narrative content, the excitements of the thing told. For an explanation of her narrative strategy of “constant recurring and beginning,” see “Composition as Explanation” 498.

12. Darwin’s account of fitness, as laid out in his theory of natural selection, refuses to specify a specific goal for life, as Elizabeth Grosz points out:

Darwin describes natural selection as a “principle of preservation,” but this preservation is quite ambiguous and multilayered. . . . Fitness carries with it the notion of an openness to changing environments; it is not necessarily the best adapted to a fixed and unchanging context. (47)

13. The legacy of Darwin is constantly being reassessed as biological science advances. In recent decades biologists have concentrated with renewed appreciation on the complexity of his ideas. The rise of evolutionary psychology in the early 1970s and the dual-inheritance theory, which considers the interactions between genetic and cultural evolution, are clear examples. The reconsideration, inevitable with any paradigm-shifting theory, insures that Darwinists have an array of competing perspectives to present. Yet the remarkable tenacity with which a large number of scientists and cultural theorists have insisted on the mindless and inevitable results of natural selection is belied by many key Darwinian observations. For an example of an influential contemporary exponent of Darwinism who treats the biologist’s theory of evolution as speaking

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to a blind, predictable mathematical algorithm of genetic variation, see Daniel Dennett.

14. See for example *The Descent of Man*, where Darwin puts forth his account of sexual selection, specifying biological changes that result at least in part from the unpredictable sexual preferences that individuals display rather than by biological inheritance alone.

15. Paul Ekman speculates that Darwin's acceptance of the Lamarckian "use-inheritance" model is a signal reason why *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* has been neglected (xxxii).

16. Wilson argues that Darwin didn't consider psychological modes of inheritance as radically distinct from biological (genetic) transmission: "Every one of Darwin's texts attests that the stuff of evolution is radically heterogeneous; certainly it is biological, but it is also psychological, cultural, geological, oceanic, and meteorological" (69).

17. Clive Bush faults Darwin for relying on a chauvinistic ideology that allies marginal subaltern subjects—representatives of "primitive" cultural phenomena—with the order of nature, thus blurring the difference between social constructions of power and natural forms of expression. He cites Darwin's example of workmen in the Botanical Gardens at Calcutta as evidence (273). Clearly, the discursive context for Darwin's use of decontextualized anthropological examples is important, but Bush neglects one surprising repercussion of Darwin's argument. One might just as well say that Darwin is providing an instance of acculturated nature as of the naturalization of a cultural network of power relations.

18. For an account of eugenics during the period and its entanglement with discourses of Social Darwinism, see Daylanne English. She refers to the paradox, as the exponents of eugenics understood it, that the less fit succeed in reproducing more and therefore thriving better. This, for any number of figures she quotes, is "unnatural selection," the result of the perverse intrusion of misguided social institutions like the welfare state or the modern factory, which work against nature and lead to a degradation of the stock.

19. Bergson spends a fair amount of time distinguishing his position from Darwin's mechanistic interpretations. See especially *Creative Evolution* 56, 62–65.

20. Bergson emphasizes contradictory tendencies in evolution, not just harmonious forms of coordination:

In communicating itself, the impetus [of life] splits up more and more. Life, in proportion to its progress, is scattered in manifestations which

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undoubtedly owe to their common origin the fact that they are complementary to each other in certain aspects, but which are none the less mutually incompatible and antagonistic. (*Creative Evolution* 103)

21. Stein spoke of her indebtedness to James's brand of thinking in numerous contexts, stating plainly that he was one of "the strongest scientific influences I had" (*Wars I Have Seen* 63–64).

22. The experiments do not specifically react against a psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious. Freud had not yet finished the *Interpretation of Dreams*, published in German in 1900. Stein was addressing the sources and antecedents from which psychoanalysis emerged. She directed her criticism at theories that hypothesized the existence of an irrational secondary personality susceptible to suggestion. Arguably she does not address central features of hysteria such as Freud understood them, which include the conflict of wishes, the repression of less-acceptable ones, and their somatic conversion. Her reference to "sub-conscious" response recalls turn-of-the-century models of hypnotic suggestion, which to a certain degree Freud set out to modify if not to challenge outright. Freud replaces the "magic, incantations, and hocus pocus" ("Lecture XXVII" 449) of suggestion with his conception of transference, which presupposes a theory of unconscious libidinal identifications. Nevertheless, by the time Stein had disavowed subconscious aims in her writing in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (published in 1933), she had already been introduced to Freudian theory by her brother and sometime housemate, Leo, who in 1909 developed an obsession with it. For an account of this see Lisa Ruddick. Therefore one presumes that her hostility to subconscious reactions eventually extended to psychoanalysis rather than limiting itself to her earlier sources.

23. While the experiments throw out a set of models that admit the potential for involuntary social conditioning—those of unconscious suggestibility—they open the door to other techniques of social control. Though psychologists were not prone to examining social conditioning per se until Frederick Winslow Taylor published his *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1905, this is at least one implicit undercurrent of Stein's analysis.

24. Following the connection made by Barbara Will, I apply the metaphor of the human motor to Stein's psychology experiment. For the nineteenth-century framework that gave rise to the study of the body as a machine that works apart from consciousness, see Anson Rabinbach. He cites interlaced discourses in physics, medicine, biology, and psychology directed at investigating the body's ideal working capacity. There are interesting parallels between the discourses that investigated the mechanical functioning of the body, which

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Rabinbach explores, and the vitalistic discourses I have cited, which are concerned specifically with the plasticity of life processes.

25. Stein was, as she noted in *Everybody's Autobiography*, younger than Solomons, and he was a graduate student. She distinguished her own view of the experiment from that of her coauthor, suggesting that she believed the procedures they followed did not succeed in casting consciousness aside. A kind of consciousness, she thought, crept into the experiment by virtue of a familiarity that she and Solomons, as the two initial subjects of the study, had with the pragmatic operations and procedures of the laboratory (274–75). In her later comments she may have conveniently attempted to rewrite an experiment whose emphasis she came to regret, but it seems just as likely that her collaboration with Solomons was itself, like many of her later collaborations, the product of a sympathetic exchange. Her resistance may not have found an adequate avenue to express itself, being an intuitive resistance embedded in a habit of mind rather than an explicit and conscious difference of opinion.

26. In 1934 Skinner, who would become the most famous behaviorist psychologist of his generation, treated Stein's published experiments as methodological models for her "advanced" compositions, contending that they duplicated her later structure and style (54).

27. Stein contests the word *automatic*, associated as it was at this point with surrealist practice and Freudian thought. "I did not think it was automatic I do not think so now, I do not think any university student is likely certainly not under observation is likely to be able to do genuinely automatic writing" (*Everybody's Autobiography* 275).

28. In a letter to her friend Lindley Hubbel, Stein rebuffed Skinner's insinuation that she had a secret to keep about the origins of her writing practices (qtd. in Meyer, "Writing Psychology Over" 141). Barbara Will, in her account of the mechanics of Stein's automatic writing, argues that the extra consciousness to which Stein refers is bound up with the effort not to take charge of movement, "resembling something like *attentive inattentiveness*" (173; Will's italics). The exact nature of the "xtra consciousness" aside, Stein thinks that the boundary that separates habit from will and attention is difficult to specify. The processes involved in writing are heterogeneous, requiring inferences, motor impulses, and regulating memories set down through a long practice of repetition. The meaning or intelligibility of all speech and writing relies to some degree on patterns of thought, learning, and sedimented history.

29. Stein and Solomons speak of the motor impulse entailed in dictation as involving "a mélange of visual and kinaesthetic material—whatever ordinarily innervates our writing—as well as other elements not easily described" (498).

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30. Habit in James's account tends to move one toward an increasingly determinate path, allowing one to overcome inertia more readily, to do the same thing with less effort and a lower level of excitation: "*habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them more accurate and diminishes fatigue*" (*Principles* 1: 112; James's italics). However, habit itself is part of a changing constellation of behaviors. New neural paths may be formed "by the sort of *chances* that in nervous material are likely to occur" (1: 109; James's italics).

31. Stein even proposes that certain predominant biases in habit formation differentiate people according to types. "Cultivated Motor Automatism" classifies types of people according to their particular reactions to the planchette. Stein draws a direct line from this insight to her experimental writing (*Everybody's Autobiography* 274).

32. Bergson was giving weekly philosophical lectures at the Collège de France to packed crowds, including a fair number of modishly hatted ladies (Grogin 122–26). The link between Bergson and Stein was to be made more than once in the course of Stein's career. See Robert E. Rogers 31 and Wyndham Lewis 49–51.

33. In later life James was in correspondence with Bergson. In one of his letters he sent along a copy of his book *Pragmatism*, suggesting that while it is "jejune and inconsiderable," it is also so "congruent with parts of your system, fits so well into interstices thereof, that you will easily understand why I am so enthusiastic. I feel that at bottom we are fighting the same fight" (*Correspondence* 11: 377).

34. See also Joan Richardson and Jonathan Levin. Curiously, contemporaries like Wyndham Lewis were more likely to cite Stein as a "time-child" in the vitalist "time cult" (55). Innumerable studies have assessed James's distinctively American brand of philosophy, but not the internationalist theories he contributed to under the diffuse rubric of vitalism. Even those who examine the cosmopolitan climate of the period tend to adopt the disciplinary preoccupations of American Studies. See Ross Posnock and Bruce Kuklick. Joseph Riddell is an outlier; he considers Stein in the context of Bergson's time philosophy.

35. A number of critics have tended to accentuate a favorable rather than antagonistic attitude to habit on the part of James. Renée Tursi describes the "modernist paradox of James's richly processive and canny narrative of habit" (10), which gives a stabilizing consistency to the operations of spontaneous will so that experience will not overwhelm agents. Liesl Olson relies on Joseph Thomas's argument that James considers habit a way to make people feel "at home" in an experience that otherwise remains uncanny. The position that

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James stakes out is analogous to Bergson's. Their alternating valuation is probably typical of the larger discourse, which oscillates between a conservative and a critical relation to the concept.

36. Not all critics trump James's psychological influence on Stein over Freudian psychoanalysis. Lisa Ruddick, for example, argues that Stein discarded Jamesian pragmatism and submitted to Freud's intellectual influence, which she incorporated unconsciously. In my opinion, though, her evidence is sufficiently scant for one to be skeptical. Stein may have been resistant to certain of James's theoretical commitments, and her writing may have displayed preoccupations with Freudian themes such as childhood experience, sexuality, and parricide, but the preponderance of evidence suggests that Stein was searching for alternatives to Freudian psychological models throughout her long career as a writer.

37. In the beginning, the narrator provides a description of Melanctha's friend Rose: "the sullen, childish, cowardly, black Rosie grumbled and fussed and howled and made herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast" (59). Dark skin brings associations of stupidity and beastliness or aggressivity in Melanctha's especially dark-skinned father, who is described as virile and fierce. The baseline characteristics that Stein associates with African American racial types deserve scrutiny. Even determining that normative average, however, is not easily done, given her emphasis on the exception. The narrator frequently makes racial generalizations only to qualify or undermine them: "Rose was never joyous with the earth-born, boundless joy of negroes. Hers was just ordinary, any sort of woman laughter" (60).

38. McCabe recounts Chaplin's encounter with Stein in the 1930s, in which she lauded his early gestural films. This is Chaplin telling the story: "She would like to see me in a movie just walking up the street and turning a corner, then another corner, and another" (qtd. in Sitney 153). The remark shows how clearly Stein understood the connection between repetition and comedy.

39. It is worth acknowledging Stein's risky and disconcerting alignment between comic form and racial typology. There is more here than a hint of minstrelsy in what I am calling a comic representation. Indeed the story itself, based on an earlier autobiographical story about a lesbian triangle, is a symbolic form of blackface. For a larger context concerning modernist racial masquerade, see Michael North, Susanna Pavloska, and Marianne Torgovnick. As Sianne Ngai points out, the comedy at stake in depictions of racialized subjects has all too often conjoined expressions of animation with a correlative inference of the characters' automation. The trait or feeling that she names "animatedness," and defines as an "'agitation' that is quickly stilled" (90) serves

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to empty out the black subject's agency, autonomy, and control. Clearly Stein doesn't simply abandon the racial stereotypes and clichés around animated bodies, but perhaps one can count her among Ngai's examples of writers and artists who "generate unanticipated social meanings and effects" (125), principally by recognizing a surplus of animation that undermines racist representations. I propose that expressions of animation on the part of Stein's characters present eruptions of "unaccounted-for autonomy" that emerge out of nature itself and modify existing power relations. For an account of the complexity and ambiguity of minstrelsy as a social form, see Eric Lott.

40. Bergsonian comedy, as Justus Nieland argues, corrects and normalizes eccentric or mildly deviant social behavior in order to preserve a "vitaly human" social order over and against the "fixity, and slumbering habits" of animals (230). Nieland makes much of Bergson's assertion that "the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human" (*Laughter* 62), which implies that any comic representation that impresses upon us a resemblance to animals or machines is merely apparent and illusory. Nieland refers to the work as "a sort of modernist biopolitics of comedy" (239) and casts Bergson as a sentinel of the humanist tradition. He suggests that like Aristotle, Bergson makes a claim for laughter as a sign of a distinctively human capacity for reflection, thus separating man as a political animal from the larger or more general ambit of life.

41. For a philosophical exposition that traces Bergson's evolution away from dualistic claims and toward monism in his late work, granting duration to both matter and life, see Deleuze 35.

42. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson clarifies that "individuality admits of any number of degrees and that it is not fully realized anywhere, even in man" (12). Life may tend toward variation without repetition, but this is just one aim or tendency, thwarted by an obverse necessity, to maintain and reproduce certain structures.

43. Darwin, incidentally, does not regard laughter as wholly distinct from animal behavior. See *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 356. Of all the expressions, Darwin regards blushing "to be the most strictly human" (358) because it requires self-consciousness.

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Monkey in the Mirror: The Science of Professor Higgins and Doctor Moreau

Laura Otis

In 1916, when George Bernard Shaw published *Pygmalion* in book form, he included a sequel describing Eliza's life after she left Higgins's laboratory.¹ To the two painful transformations depicted in the play, he now added a third. After reading the novels of H. G. Wells, Freddy's snobby sister Clara undergoes changes almost as drastic as Eliza's or her father's:

When Mr. H. G. Wells lifted [Clara] on the point of his puissant pen, and placed her at the angle of view from which the life she was leading and the society to which she clung appeared in its true relation to real human needs and worthy social structure, he effected a conversion and a conviction of sin comparable to the most sensational feats of General Booth.² (115)

In the formulaic tales of Salvation Army founder William Booth, degraded workers recovered their humanity when they were dragged back across a boundary between animal and human. Shaw's *Pygmalion* parodies such conversion narratives, in which miserable creatures are rehumanized and achieve enlightenment. Aligning the younger, politically concerned writer with Booth's views, Shaw mocks Wells as an apostle of social change. Nevertheless, *Pygmalion* bears a striking resemblance to Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, which two decades earlier had depicted the sufferings of vivisected animals taught to speak. Both works suggest the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of Booth-style transformations. Wells's novella and Shaw's play overturn Booth's narratives by problematizing the animal/hu-

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man divide, suggesting the limits of plasticity and the futility of arbitrary individual conversions.

As London intellectuals with socialist leanings, Shaw and Wells knew one another and exchanged critiques of each other's work. From 1901 onward, they maintained a sharp, sometimes bitter correspondence in which they clashed about writing, Fabian socialism, and Wells's love life. Yet for all their disagreements, their works share a resonance frequency. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* appeared in April 1896, and Shaw envisioned the encounter between his flower girl and professor of phonetics as early as September 1897.³ In both novella and play, self-centered experimenters try to make people from "animals," mainly to see if they can do it. These transformations cause excruciating pain, and the scientists give little thought to how the creatures will live once they have been transformed. In both "romances"⁴ language learning plays a key role, even as Wells and Shaw challenge the notion that speech distinguishes people from animals. Both works also draw on Darwin's evolutionary biology to imply that willed, targeted interference with evolutionary processes causes mostly pain, since all living beings have evolved in conjunction with their environments. While *Pygmalion*—not *Moreau*—is sometimes read as an educational success story, the works are equally ironic in the social experiments they depict. In both the play and the novella, talking "animals" question the facile application of biological laws to complex, hierarchical societies.

The bath of burning pain

In the 1890s comparisons of workers to savages were common, even among those trying hardest to help the poor. William Booth based his best seller *In Darkest England* on an extended metaphor comparing the living conditions in London to those in Central Africa. "As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?" he asked.

May we not find a parallel at our own doors, and discover within a stone's throw of our cathedrals and palaces similar horrors to those which Stanley has found existing in the great Equatorial forest?" (11–12)

Booth hoped to divert some of the Christian energy being poured into missionary societies into projects for England's own poor. Journalist

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Margaret Harkness, an outspoken advocate of the Salvation Army, built on Booth's metaphors in her popular novels about slum life. The narrator of Harkness's *In Darkest London* reflects, "Very rightly does Professor Huxley say that it is better to be born a savage in some heathen land than a slummer in Christian England" (196).

According to a cultural tradition that preceded Darwin, the move from savage to beast was just one step down, a small slide along a continuum. In nineteenth-century England comparisons of workers to animals abounded, particularly when alcohol was involved. In Harkness's novel an experienced Salvation Army worker explains to a novice that men go into gin shops thinking, "I can't get no work, so I may as well make a beast of myself, and forget God made a man of me at the beginning" (145). As rescue stories, Salvation Army narratives often represent the poor as creatures who have regressed from human to animal, slipping—through no fault of their own—across an identifiable boundary. Booth, for example, reports that

Our Officers entered a hole, unfit to be called a human habitation—more like the den of some wild animal. . . . The inhabitant of this wretched den was a poor woman, who fled into the darkest corner of the place as our Officer entered. . . . Her feet were bare, her hair matted and foul, presenting on the whole such an object as one could scarcely imagine living in a civilized country. . . . We took the poor creature away, washed and clothed her; and, changed in heart and life, she is one more added to the number of those who rise up to bless the Salvation Army workers. (191)

Designed to inspire, these stories depict the poor as animals with souls, creatures whose humanity can be restored through near-miraculous interventions. The first step in such a conversion was a thorough scrubbing, aimed to confer dignity by returning the poor creature's human appearance.

In *Pygmalion* as in the Salvation Army narratives it spoofs, physical cleansing plays a crucial role. That bathing keeps one human is one of the few middle-class values that Shaw's play does not defy. Before Eliza can learn to speak English properly, she must undergo "the bath of burning pain." The phrase is Moreau's: frustrated by his creatures' tendency to revert, he vows, "Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain I say, 'This time I will burn out all the animal'" (Wells, *Moreau*

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51). His wording recalls Puritan attempts, invariably disastrous, to “burn the animal” out of people. When Prendick enters the beast folk’s village, he notes their persistent animality: “I became aware of a disagreeable odor, like that of a monkey’s cage ill cleaned” (36). Moreau’s use of the bath as metaphor suggests he sees it as a significant, if unsuccessful, part of humanization. In turn-of-the-century London, dirt was a key marker distinguishing rich from poor and, by association, human from animal. In his opening scene, Shaw acknowledges the unfairness of this criterion, remarking in his stage directions that Eliza is “as clean as she can afford to be” (Shaw, *Pygmalion* 11). Still, as Mrs. Pearce explains, coaxing Eliza into the bath, “You know you can’t be a nice girl inside if you’re a dirty slut outside” (36). Cleanliness is the first step in the transformation from animal to human.

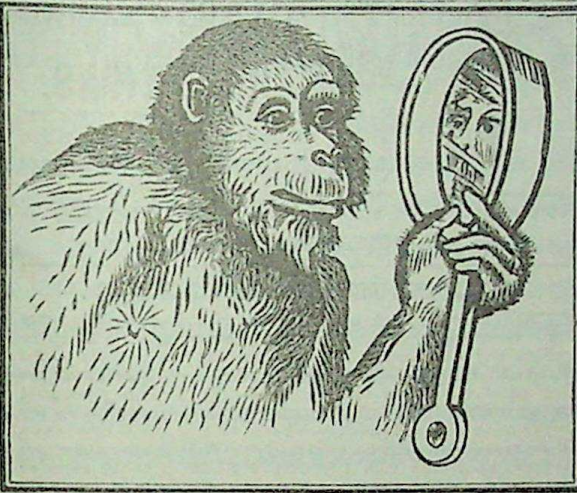
In this scene in which the “animal” is burned out, Shaw makes light-hearted references to Darwin. Before Eliza steps into the bath of hot mustard, she spies herself in a mirror. Even though most audiences never saw the bath scene, Shaw made sure they knew about the mirror by having Eliza complain of it in the ensuing dialogue.⁵ Mrs. Pearce scrubs Eliza with Monkey Brand soap, while downstairs, her father tells Higgins, “I can’t carry the girl through the streets like a blooming monkey, can I?” (44). In popular advertisements for Monkey Brand, “The Only Natural Cleanser,” a monkey studies his face in a shiny pan. Like the advertisement, Shaw plays with the idea that monkeys and humans are close relatives: a bath with Monkey Brand makes one feel human again when one’s reflection suggests otherwise. The only difference, supposedly, is one of cleanliness. Fully cleansed, Eliza becomes a fast-evolving hybrid destabilizing the boundary between human and animal.

The flower girl’s second glance at herself in the mirror suggests her awareness of her fluid identity. Just before leaving Higgins after their fight following the Ambassador’s Ball, she “takes a last look at herself in the glass” and “suddenly puts out her tongue at herself” (81). In *The Descent of Man* Darwin had noted, “the strong tendency in our nearest allies, the monkeys . . . to imitate whatever they hear deserves notice,” and like her biological kinfolk, Eliza is an adept mimic (91). In her gesture of fun, she acts as a playful animal and a sentient woman, so that the origin of her impulse is unclear. Even more than the viewer, she knows how much she has changed and what she retains of her former self. Carefully placed, these moments of self-study mark vital moments in Eliza’s transformation:

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stepping into the bath, stepping out into the world. They have a delicious ambiguity, as evolutionary and social change pause to look themselves in the eye. Altered by the language and customs she has learned to imitate, Eliza sees a monkey in the mirror. Simultaneously she realizes that she is Higgins's monkey, aping the middle class.

READ the DIRECTIONS on the OTHER SIDE.



REGISTERED TRADE MARK.

NO
Injurious substances are used in the Manufacture of

BROOKE'S SOAP.
"Monkey Brand."

This Product has been tested by the leading Analysts of Great Britain, and pronounced

"The Only Natural Cleanser."

The "LANCET" says:—
"This Soap is specially recommended for cleaning and polishing. It answers admirably. It is very effectual in removing dirt and stains, at the same time giving a good polish."

The "BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL" says:—
"It is well adapted for removing stains, rust, and dirt."

Many others might be quoted did space permit, but the two highest medical authorities will, it is hoped, be deemed sufficient.

B. BROOKE & Co.,
Philadelphia, U.S.A.

READ the DIRECTIONS on the OTHER SIDE.

An 1889 advertisement for Monkey Brand soap. Source: The British Library Online Gallery. Advert For Brooke's Monkey Brand Soap. Web. Reproduced with kind permission of the British Library.

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Even though Wells's and Shaw's transformations of animals into people build on cultural comparisons, they problematize the boundaries between these categories. Wells's narrator, Prendick, who has turned to science to alleviate the boredom of his "comfortable independence," recalls:

I would see one of the clumsy bovine-creatures who worked the launch, treading heavily through the undergrowth, and find myself asking, trying hard to recall, how he differed from some really human yokel trudging home from his mechanical labors.
(55)

Of course, Prendick is not comparing workers to beasts; he is comparing them to Moreau's bovine-human hybrids. Higgins comes closer to Booth's narratives when he tells Eliza, "[Fine!] Work til you're more a brute than a human being, and then cuddle and squabble and drink til you fall asleep" (103). If one is going to claim that people differ from animals, these works imply, one must specify which people one means. Despite Higgins's and Moreau's astonishing lack of sympathy, they are never compared to animals the way that Shaw's and Wells's lower-class characters are. In this fashion, *Pygmalion* and *Moreau* reinforce class boundaries even as they challenge the human/animal divide.

As Prendick learns—more slowly than the reader—who Moreau's beast folk are, he assesses them with all the criteria he can think of to distinguish humans from beasts. They talk, build houses, have erect posture, even try to think. But one by one, these potential boundaries collapse. In Wells's novella people such as the alcoholic Montgomery behave like animals, and some of the beast folk have sympathetic qualities. When Montgomery travels to Arica to buy supplies, he finds the inhabitants "unnaturally long in the leg, flat in the face, prominent in the forehead, suspicious, dangerous, and cold-hearted" (54). The difference between people and animals, Wells's story implies, is one of degree, not kind. "We're all savages, more or less," Higgins tells Eliza (58). The professor of phonetics does not go so far as to say "we're all animals," but on his mental continuum between scholar and beast, the boundaries are fluid.

To Higgins, the divisions between social classes are borders in a game of skill. He delights in smuggling his "monkey" across these borders, exposing their meaninglessness with adolescent glee. The play itself, however, implies that neither natural nor social change comes easily. Like

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Shaw's own transformation, Eliza's learning hurts. Her animality cannot be scoured off with a burning brush, and her bath is a failed synecdoche for a greater transformative process.

Twin transformations

Considering the lives that Wells and Shaw led, it is not surprising that they wrote about painful metamorphoses, or that they did so in such different ways. Each man used his wit and his daunting creative powers to fight his way out of poverty into the most respected intellectual circles. As they transformed themselves, both authors suffered humiliations, altering their speech, their appearance, and the mannerisms they had come to regard as natural. Deeply aware of the implications of evolutionary theory, both men took ironic, sharply critical attitudes toward any attempts to see natural structures in social hierarchies. However, their different routes into bourgeois society left them with contrasting attitudes toward science and toward natural selection in particular.

Ten years older than Wells, Shaw grew up in a troubled Irish Protestant family, though not one that was culturally deprived. When he was seventeen, his mother left his alcoholic father to join her lover, a voice teacher, in London, while Shaw stayed behind as a clerk in a land office (Peters 5–6). Three years later he moved in with his mother and his older sister in London, but this new family collapsed when his mother's partner made advances to Shaw's sister. After rejecting him, Shaw's mother used his method to teach singing herself, supporting Shaw for nine years while he perfected his writing and made social connections (6–7). By the mid-1880s he was a respected music, art, and theater critic, and he began writing his own plays in the early 1890s (7).

Unlike Shaw, Wells had known hunger. The son of a lady's maid and a former gardener, he struggled to educate himself while apprenticed to a draper and chemist (Batchelor 1–2; Foot 1–10). In 1884 he won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in London, where bright young men from poor families could be trained as science teachers. Few students could live on the allotted guinea a week, and Wells recalls seeing students faint with hunger in the labs (*Autobiography* 192). Despite his enthusiasm for T. H. Huxley's biology classes the first year, Wells spent his second year reading history, economics, and politics, and failed to graduate. In 1890 he earned a Bachelor of Science degree at University College, London,

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and for five years taught school while writing short fiction and popular science articles. After publishing *The Time Machine* in 1895, he was able, like Shaw, to support himself by writing.

These different paths to literary success fostered contrasting attitudes toward experimental science, evolutionary biology, and vivisection. At the Normal School of Science, Wells studied elementary biology and zoology with T. H. Huxley, whom he deeply admired (*Autobiography* 159). In his lectures, wrote Wells, Huxley had offered “a vivid, sustained attempt to see life clearly and to see it whole, to see into it, to see its inter-connexions, to find out . . . what it was, where it came from, what it was doing and where it was going” (169). This hard, holistic view of life appealed to Wells, who was inclined toward the practical and the material. In the life sciences, he learned best from laboratory work. In the zoology lab, he recalled, “I had been confronted by a newly killed rabbit; I had begun forthwith upon its dissection and in a week or so I had acquired a precise and ample knowledge of mammalian anatomy up to and including the structure of the brain” (171). Believing that one learned best from hands-on science, Wells supported vivisection as long as investigators acted responsibly and their experiments promised to yield useful knowledge (Haynes, “Wells’s Debt” 37).

Shaw, in contrast, opposed vivisection all his life, finding animal experiments no less reprehensible than those performed on human beings (Peters 10). In the 24 July 1927 *Sunday Express* he replied to Wells, who had published an article in favor of vivisection:

We have it at last from Mr. Wells. The vivisector experiments because he wants to know. On the question whether it is right to hurt any living creature for the sake of knowledge, his answer is that knowledge is so supremely important that for its sake there is nothing that it is not right to do. (qtd. in Hennelly 217)

To a greater degree than Wells, Shaw doubted scientists’ ability to build generalizable knowledge from their observations and to apply it with unfailing judgment. No reader of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* would call Wells an unqualified supporter of vivisection, and clearly he wondered what pain irresponsible scientists might cause if they experimented without moral restraint or supervision. Moreau’s and Higgins’s projects suggest both writers’ concern with the ethics of experimentation at a time when scientific knowledge was increasing faster than awareness of

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its social implications. While Moreau comes across as more reflective and mature than Higgins, both scientists outspokenly prioritize the creation of knowledge over their subjects' well-being.

More than Wells, to whom science had opened all of learning, Shaw felt driven to question scientists' authority, viewing their knowledge claims as presumptuous and arrogant. Railing against vaccination, he wrote to Wells in 1901, "These doctors all think that science is knowledge, instead of being the very opposite of knowledge: to wit, speculation" (Shaw and Wells 8). Having struggled economically and risen by making insightful comparisons of art to life, he mistrusted knowledge generated in a lab. And as a connoisseur of human nature, he anticipated the biases that such learning would incorporate.

Wells replied to him, "Science is neither knowledge nor speculation. It is criticism ending in Wisdom" (Shaw and Wells 10). Respecting science's demand for hard evidence, Wells cherished its pointed debates and its openness to correction. Trained by Huxley, who had transformed the Normal School to bring laboratory science to working men, Wells saw science's progressive potential to subvert unfounded social assumptions that were crushing millions of lives. He also knew, however, how greatly scientists varied in their ethics, their energy, and their intelligence. After Huxley's riveting biology course, he found himself bored and frustrated by physics the next year. Uninspired by a less-engaging scientist, he focused on the socialist texts he was reading and failed his final exams (*Autobiography* 165–96). It is thus understandable that he and Shaw depicted painful experiments, despite Wells's belief in the positive aspects of science. Still, Higgins and Moreau convey the authors' contrasting attitudes toward experiments on creatures able to feel pain. Both want to make changes and watch the results, but only Moreau communicates a passionate commitment to exploring the way life works.

As literary works depicting experiments, *Pygmalion* and *Moreau* share an underlying structure. If one defines an experiment in a loose sense, as an intervention in natural processes motivated by curiosity, then both works represent experimental trials. "Will you drop me altogether now that the experiment is over?" Eliza asks Pickering (94). Initially, Henry Higgins's experiment promises to subvert class boundaries, and appropriately, his workspace combines the nineteenth-century physiology lab with the bourgeois parlor. Shaw's stage directions refer to "the Wimpole Street laboratory," suggesting that he, if not Higgins, saw the character's

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drawing room in that respect (73). Designed for comfort, Higgins's lab contains a laryngoscope, organ pipes, gas burners, wax cylinders, a grand piano, and a dish of chocolates (23). Yet despite the detailed stage directions, Shaw structured his play so that most audiences never saw Higgins experiment. In an opening note to technicians, Shaw specified that the scenes separated by asterisks could be performed only on film or on the best-equipped stages, so that in most performances they were left out. Among the omitted scenes were Eliza's bath and the brief glimpse of her training in act 2, so that most viewers saw Eliza only "before" and "after." Like Prendick, they would have experienced her alteration only through her "heartrending" screams offstage (37).

About Moreau's space the reader learns even less, since like Shaw, Wells black-boxes his lab. Although he is tormented by the screams from Moreau's room, Prendick is barred by "The Locked Door," the title of Wells's seventh chapter. The marooned naturalist enters Moreau's lab only when the physiologist forgets to lock it, and after a quick glimpse of "something bound painfully upon a framework," he is bodily thrown out (32). When Prendick returns to the lab after Moreau's death, Wells declines to describe it. The shattered narrator reports only, "we went in to the laboratory and put an end to all we found living there" (70). Probably Wells thought that the Moreau horrors would be most gruesome if left to the reader's imagination, as Shaw did sixteen years later. As realists, both writers may have sensed that a detailed description was less believable than a gap asking to be filled. Despite their differing attitudes toward science, Wells and Shaw made some similar choices in their literary representation of it. The first of these was black-boxing the lab, since in each story, the fact of the transformation mattered more than the process. What counted was not the mechanism of change but its social and ethical implications.

A second striking parallel between Wells's and Shaw's fictional experiments can be seen in their representations of the scientists' motives. Moreau and Higgins share a strong but unfocused desire to know, a curiosity to see what kinds of transformations they can effect. In the long chapter "Dr. Moreau Explains," Moreau never tells Prendick why he wants to make people from animals, but he does convey his scientific values. "I asked a question, devised some method of obtaining an answer, and got—a fresh question," the vivisector tells him. "I wanted—to find out the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape" (48). An ambivalent figure, Moreau combines a monstrous lack of sympathy with intelligence

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and honesty, expressing what many scientists must have thought but didn't dare say. Higgins, the expert on speech, does not articulate his desire so clearly, but like Moreau, he loves a challenge. Deciding to accept Pickering's wager, he exclaims, "What is life but a series of inspired follies? The difficulty is to find them to do" (*Pygmalion* 29). When Pickering questions him, warning that if Eliza agrees to work with him, she must "understand thoroughly what she's doing," Higgins scoffs, "Do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?" (33–34). In his desire to transform a flower girl and in Moreau's wish to educate pigs, one detects the same urge to play God, to create a human being from base material. Reproached by Eliza that he never thought of the trouble he was making for her, Higgins replies, "Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble" (101). Altering reasonably adapted beings to see whether they can do it, Moreau and Higgins create troubled life.

In these urges to test nature's and society's limits, one senses that both authors find something admirable. Their choices about the kinds of experiments to depict, however, reflect their own experiences. Whereas Higgins challenges class boundaries upheld by speech, Moreau explores "life" in Huxley's sense, trying to "see its inter-connexions." Both authors are concerned with the ethics of experimentation, representing their scientists with dark irony.

As modern Frankensteins, Moreau and Higgins resemble each other most closely in their lack of responsibility, their disregard for the lives they have changed.⁶ Like the sculptor Pygmalion, both scientists work on islands, but Moreau, on his remote Pacific "biological station," has only to worry about his creatures' fitness for their new natural environment (18). Though he has taught them laws, expecting them to form a society, his beast folk live in miserable confusion. Like Frankenstein, Moreau has not nurtured his creatures, supporting their emerging social instincts. Unchallenged, Higgins would have had just as little interest in Eliza's future, but Shaw's female characters cross-examine the experimenter. "What is to become of her when you've finished your teaching?" (32) asks his housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce. His mother observes, more pointedly, that he is giving Eliza "the manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income" (67). Both works imply that individuals can be changed, but these changes will cause only humiliation, pain, and perhaps violence unless planned in relation to the environment with which the creature has coevolved.

Significantly, while Wells's novella and Shaw's play depict multiple transformations, each focuses on the vivisection of one resistant female. At the core of each plot is a male scientist's violent intervention in the life of a female animal. The first time Moreau discusses his work with Prendick, the physiologist calls his lab "a kind of Blue-Beard's chamber" (20). Wells's narrative follows the tortures of a captive puma that arrives on Moreau's island with Prendick and eventually kills her tormentor. There is no doubt about the puma's gender, since Moreau calls the desperate animal "her" (51). Because her screams spur Prendick's curiosity and conscience, the novella progresses with her transformation. Maddened by her cries, he feels "as if all the pain in the world had found a voice" (24). When the puma finally breaks loose, tearing her fetters from the wall, Prendick reports that it—or she—"met its persecutor with a shriek almost exactly like that of an angry virago" (64). Prendick's choice to call her "it" in this scene suggests that he still sees her as an animal, and that Moreau's last transformation remains incomplete. As woman or beast, she retains the strength to smash Moreau's head with her fetters. One cannot help but think of Eliza, whose screams from the bathroom are "heartrending" (37) and who, when humiliated by Higgins, "instinctively darts her nails at his face" (76). Like Shaw and Wells, Eliza and the puma undergo twin transformations.

Unlike the puma, Eliza comes to Higgins of her own free will; the lessons on proper speech are her idea, not his. Still, Higgins sees his potential pupil as somewhat less than human, telling Pickering, "This unfortunate animal has been locked up for nine years in school at our expense to teach her to speak and read the language of Shakespeare and Milton" (51). Shaw hints repeatedly that in Higgins's eyes, at least, Eliza is a monkey: an apt and imitative pupil. Though she is far more intelligent than Moreau's ape man, she shares with him a fascination with language, and her first, uncontrolled attempts to use upper-class speech recall his ridiculous "big thinks" (*Moreau* 49, 81). Both works represent a forced evolution from animal to human in which a male scientist imposes foreign habits on a female body. In their depiction of painful, callously implemented experiments, the works are fundamentally similar.

Pygmalion and *Moreau* differ in their portrayals of the creatures' responses, as Eliza survives the "surgery" that killed the puma. These contrasting visions of adaptation suggest how differently Wells and Shaw saw evolution. Inspired by Huxley, Darwin's most aggressive advocate,

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Wells believed in natural selection. He was convinced, that is, that life had evolved because randomly occurring changes made some animals better suited to their environments, allowing them to reproduce in greater numbers (Haynes, "Wells's Debt" 31). According to this harsher understanding of evolution, those animals not favored by chance could only suffer and die. Shaw, on the other hand, embraced Lamarck's hypothesis of the inheritance of acquired characters, jabbing at Wells in their private letters:

A man who cannot see that the fundamental way for a camelopard [giraffe] to lengthen his neck is to want it longer, and to want it hard enough, and who explains the camelopard by a farfetched fiction of an accidentally longnecked Romeo of the herd meeting an accidentally longnecked Juliet . . . ought really to be locked up! (Shaw and Wells 8)

As suggested by Shaw's interpretation, Lamarck's vision of change over time offered a more optimistic view of evolution. If acquired changes could be passed on to one's offspring, then each individual's behavior mattered, contributing to the species' store of hereditary material. Faced with an environmental challenge, an animal could react, then favor its young with the self-induced changes. Under natural selection, animals could respond to environmental challenges only if they had inherited the capacity to do so, and they could pass on only what they had inherited, not what they had learned.

Wells was Darwinian, not Lamarckian, accepting natural selection as the mechanism of change but resisting spurious extensions of it to the social world. In an 1895 article, some of which he incorporated into *Doctor Moreau* verbatim, he argued:

We overlook only too often the fact that a living being may . . . be regarded as raw material, as something plastic, something that may be shaped and altered, . . . and the organism as a whole developed far beyond its apparent possibilities. We overlook this collateral factor, and so too much of our modern morality becomes mere subservience to natural selection.

(Wells, "Plasticity" 90)

Rejecting the arrogance of Social Darwinism, Wells claims that inherited material provides potential, not destiny. He thus envisions a different route to social change, but ultimately he approaches Shaw's position. Socialism

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appealed to both writers, since both believed that within limits, societies could change, and that one's parents' profession did not guarantee that one was best suited for their trade. Although Wells thought that evolutionary changes occurred randomly, he did not want to see natural selection used to uphold class differences. While disagreeing about how evolution had taken place, both writers resisted using it to justify social hierarchies.

As subtexts, their contrasting narratives of evolution provided the material out of which *Doctor Moreau* and *Pygmalion* grew.⁷ Dr. Moreau's experiments yield creatures who are unsuited for their environments and die snapping at each other's throats. Post-Higgins, Eliza will be equally unhappy in Covent Garden and in upper-class drawing rooms. In neither case is the transformation an unqualified success, since the new beings cannot live in unchanged environments. While neither work endorses Social Darwinism, both invite comparisons of natural and social development. In nature and society, they imply, significant changes can occur, but systemic structures will limit plasticity.

Natural language

In language, natural and social forces merge, and unsurprisingly, Wells and Shaw focus on speech as a way to represent their interaction. Realizing how Higgins's lessons are changing her, Eliza tells him, "I only want to be natural" (102). In context, her ironic plea reveals how deeply Shaw's play—like Wells's novel—undercuts any barrier between the natural and the social. In a cultural sphere, *Pygmalion* demonstrates the plasticity of which Wells wrote, since with little help, Eliza is "developed far beyond [her] apparent possibilities." Of course, Higgins never intends to turn a flower girl into a duchess, only to pass her off as one (Cavell 413). The terms of the bet depend not on what Eliza is but on how she is perceived. Inspired by Lamarck, Shaw's play illustrates how quickly an "animal" can change, but as in Wells's more Darwinian work, this capacity is limited.

At first glance, Wells's story focuses exclusively on the natural world. "Howled out" of England, Moreau is working in isolation and has no plans to test his creatures in society. Except for Prendick, who stumbles upon the "biological station" by accident, and Montgomery, who, as an alcoholic, is himself half beast, there is no existing society to judge the beast folk. What counts is not how they are perceived but how they act. But as Bruce Clarke has pointed out, "the successes and failures of Moreau's

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experiments are as much social as natural" (55). As would-be humans, his beast people are supposed to communicate, cohabit, and build social bonds. To alter their behavior, he has combined fear with hypnotic suggestion, attempting to inculcate laws that fail to take hold in the creatures' fluttering consciousness. In their struggles against the constraints of these laws, the creatures resemble the human models their creator had in mind. To be human, Moreau's beasts must be social, but despite the scientist's efforts, the emergence of social bonds defies his understanding.

As beast folk, *Pygmalion* and *Doctor Moreau* suggest, we are all tortured by social laws that contradict our instincts, drives that evolution has developed in response to particular environments. Reflecting on the cruelty of Moreau's experiments, Prendick thinks:

Before, they had been beasts, their instincts fitly adapted to their surroundings, and happy as living things may be. Now they stumbled in the shackles of humanity, lived in a fear that never died, fretted by a law they could not understand. (63)

In *Pygmalion* Eliza's father echoes these words almost exactly when an American millionaire's gift transforms him from a dustman into a lecturer on public morals. "Who asked him to make a gentleman of me?" he demands. "I was happy. I was free. . . . Now I am worried, tied neck and heels" (89). So strong is the resonance between these passages ("fretted"/"worried") that one wonders whether Shaw had Wells's text in mind. Possessing a gentleman's income but lacking a gentleman's education, Doolittle becomes the monkey in his daughter's mirror. With or without money, neither is fitted for his or her new social environment.

With a certain irony, both Shaw and Wells pinpoint language as the most essential skill for success in social adaptation. In targeting language as a capacity marking the animal-human boundary, these writers were not alone. Turn-of-the-century texts comparing workers to savages or beasts often posited speech (along with cleanliness) as a key criterion distinguishing people from animals. The narrator of *In Darkest London* refers to the "curses of men lower than the beasts but for the gift of speech" (Harkness 23). At first Henry Higgins seems to share this view, admonishing Eliza, "Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech" (18). However, Shaw's play explodes any notion of speech as a divine gift setting people apart from animals. Similarly, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* posits a continuum of communicative sound across

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the species barrier. From his first encounters with the beast folk, Prendick presumes that they are or were human because they can speak, and that Moreau's operations have stripped people of their humanity. Significantly, he is wrong, and he clings to the language argument as he resists the truth. "These animals *talk!*" he tells Moreau (47, Wells's italics).

But the "gift of articulate speech," at first solid enough to fool Prendick, dissolves as the animals' instincts reassert themselves. In the months after Moreau's death, he notices "a growing coarseness of articulation, a growing disinclination to talk," and asks the reader, "Can you imagine language, once clear-cut and exact, softening and guttering, losing shape and import, becoming mere lumps of sound again?" (81). Reflecting upper-class attitudes toward lower-class speech, Prendick's observations of the intermediate stages of language subvert the notion of it as a unique capacity. Between animal grunts and human eloquence lies a continuous spectrum, and articulate speech can be simulated, learned, and lost. By representing language coalescing and dissolving, *Pygmalion* and *Doctor Moreau* disqualify language as a well-defined boundary separating people from animals. The beast folk's failure to retain speech suggests the limits of plasticity: language can be acquired, but it will slip away unless integrated into a receptive structure.

Depicting language in the making, Wells and Shaw followed Darwin, who in *The Descent of Man* used a similar strategy to prove that oral communication was not uniquely human. As he did with many traits animals supposedly did not share, Darwin used complementary strategies: first, breaking the trait into component parts (such as understanding vs. producing articulated sounds); and second, offering numerous examples of animals that possessed these components (such as dogs and parrots). The aim of *The Descent of Man* is to deconstruct an arbitrary but hallowed boundary, and showing how language could have evolved is a crucial step in this deconstruction. "I cannot doubt," wrote Darwin, "that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures" (91). The "softening and guttering" articulations that Prendick hears invert the coalescent ones Darwin must have imagined, but Eliza's "Ah-ow-oo-oooh!" (50) recreates them convincingly. Effectively, all three writers explode the notion of unified language, which is no longer absent or present but can exist in any number of degrees.⁸

The British phonetician Henry Sweet, one source for Henry Hig-

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gins's character, did see a clear boundary between animal noises and human articulations. In the preface to *Pygmalion* Shaw mentions Sweet but rightly denies that Higgins "is" the irascible phonetician (6).⁹ Trained at Oxford, Sweet hoped to form an English philological school based on the comparative linguistics developing in Germany. Rather than seeking the origins of languages in ancient texts, this new generation of scholars based the study of language on phonetics, on spoken dialects instead of written records (Wainger 561). According to Sweet, "The living spoken form of every language should be made the foundation of its study" (8). In the 1880s, when Shaw met Sweet, the phonetician was systematically studying English dialects. "Not a very sociable being" (Wainger 560), Sweet could distinguish and enunciate seventy-two vowel sounds (570) and sometimes whipped out a notebook at social gatherings to write down what people were saying (558). Highly respected in Germany, Sweet never received an Oxford chair and fumed over British linguists' lack of appreciation for his work (567). Shaw, however, admired Sweet greatly, inspired by his belief that there was no "standard" or "ideal" pronunciation (Holroyd 2: 326). When the future playwright first came to London, he had struggled to transform his Irish accent and knew the advantages conveyed by knowledge of phonetics (Greene xiii). When Higgins calls phonetics "the science of speech" (17), he echoes Sweet's definition of phonology as "the science of linguistic observation" (Sweet 1). Interestingly, the team Higgins-Pickering (Eliza is transformed by this duo, not by Higgins alone) also reflects Sweet's transformation of linguistics. Pickering, the author of *Spoken Sanskrit*, turns signs into spoken sounds, whereas Higgins, the author of *Higgins's Universal Alphabet*, turns sounds into signs.

Sweet saw a definable boundary between animal noises and human speech. In his experience:

Such interjections as *pah!* or . . . the series of whistles with which a monkey expresses surprise or curiosity, are fairly articulate; but they are not logically articulate like the sentences of language proper, in which words are combined together to express corresponding combinations of ideas into thoughts. (6)

Dr. Moreau has a lower opinion of monkeys' abilities to articulate sounds, but his phrasing suggests that Wells, like Shaw, knew something about linguistics. Moreau tells Prendick, "The great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx, . . . in the incapacity to frame delicately different

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sound-symbols by which thought could be sustained" (47). In associating language with thought, Sweet and Moreau—though probably not Shaw and Wells—followed Darwin, who wrote, "a complex train of thought can no more be carried on without the aid of words, whether spoken or silent, than a long calculation without the use of figures or algebra" (92). *Doctor Moreau* and *Pygmalion* suggest that Wells and Shaw doubted this view, for both works challenge the notion that transforming people's language will transform their consciousness. In their fictional science, language learning is necessary but insufficient to produce significant, lasting change in a creature's mind.

Moreau, a plastic surgeon, tries to sculpt ideas by molding spoken language. The premise that teaching language teaches thought underlies his experimental program. As he explains to Prendick:

A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily. In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of superseding old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. Very much indeed of what we call moral education . . . is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct. (47)

Moreau controls his population of beast folk with laws, which they are to recite regularly until his sayings sink in. In Eliza's repeated assertion "I'm a good girl, I am" (31), she resembles the beast folk, who ask endlessly, "Are we not men?" (38). Unlike them, she has not acquired this phrase from her creator; on the contrary, she uses it to resist his intellectual advances. Yet as performative speech, her phrase resembles Moreau's laws, since in being pronounced, it strives to bring about what it promises. At times, the re-created beings have more confidence than their creators that the words they are reciting make them human.

The transformed creatures' efforts to achieve humanity through speech give *Pygmalion* and *Moreau* some of their most moving moments. In their spoken, performative attempts to be good humans, the experimental subjects reveal the experimenters' flawed humanity. This contrast between the flawed scientist and the suffering subject deepens the ethical dimension of each work. The novella and the play share a terrible irony

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in that each scientist's attempt to alter thought through language fails to broaden his own outlook.

Neither *Doctor Moreau* nor *Pygmalion* endorses the idea that changing language changes consciousness. If anything, these works show the limited value of acquired speech. As Higgins puts it, "you have to consider not only *how* a girl pronounces, but what she pronounces" (56, Shaw's emphasis). If the purpose of Moreau's and Higgins's experiments is to learn how language imposed from without will affect an inarticulate subject, then they are successful, but if it is to transform the subject's thinking in any planned way, they are both failures. Although Moreau wants to alter his subjects' mental structure, he hesitates to call the finished products men. "Hi non sunt homines," he tells Prendick. "Sunt animalia qui nos habemus—vivisected. A humanizing process" (43). In certain moments, Higgins surpasses Moreau in his dreams of transformation, confiding to his mother, "You have no idea how frightfully interesting it is to take a human being and change her into a quite different human being by creating a new speech for her" (65). Just how "different" Eliza is after her training, however, is the central question of Shaw's play. The accent and social skills she has acquired have opened new possibilities, but the intelligence and drive that will let her use them predate Higgins's experiments.

In these works about change, Wells and Shaw ultimately suggest that some aspects of human experience can be altered, and others can't. Manipulating living beings haphazardly, their scientists use strategies inappropriate to produce long-term effects. Longing to influence his animals' "most intimate structure" (46), Moreau performs crude grafting operations, and not surprisingly, his animals revert. "Somehow the things drift back again," he broods, "The stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again" (50). As Rachel Bowser has observed, Moreau has been "changing the surface in order to change the depth," and of course has failed (167). The alterations in Eliza run deeper and will likely last, but for her as for the beast folk, the transformation is no educational triumph.¹⁰ Her newly acquired capacities will have value only if she can apply them, and this will depend not just on her but on her environment. Like Wells, Shaw presents language as an unstable skill, one that can be sustained only under two conditions. Not only must the right mental structures be in place; language must be nurtured through social interactions.

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Monsters manufactured

As London writers committed to socialism, Shaw and Wells exchanged trenchant letters, cutting each other for their stylistic differences as well as their contrasting visions of social change. Although Shaw respected Wells, he belittled the younger writer. "As you are an interesting youth, I may as well hear what babble you may have to offer," he wrote in March 1904 (Shaw and Wells 14). Neither of the two took such comments seriously, but Shaw's mocking sometimes cut deep. Although neither man accepted the class hierarchy, Shaw tried to intimidate Wells when the younger man's behavior disrupted the Fabian Society, to which both for a time belonged. In March 1908, Shaw took a particularly patronizing tone:

When you first spoke at a Fabian meeting, I told you to hold up your head and speak to the bracketed bust of Selwyn Image on the back wall. . . . [Instead] you made the commonest blunder of the tyro: you insisted on having a table; leaning over it on your knuckles; and addressing the contents of your contracted chest to the tablecloth. I will now, having tried to cure you of that by fair means in vain, cure you of it by a blow beneath the belt. Where did you get that attitude? IN THE SHOP. At the New Reform Club, when your knuckles touched the cloth, you said unconsciously, by reflex action, "Anything else today, madam," and later on, "What's the next article?" (66)

To such blows, Wells responded sarcastically. "You write the most gorgeous letters!" he exclaimed, "I bow down" (41). Taking the attitude of Moreau's beast folk, he mocked the witty playwright, who had never worked in a shop—and who had never attended a university. As self-styled intellectuals, both writers remained uneasy about their origins.

Given the differences in their backgrounds, it is not surprising that Shaw and Wells had contrasting visions of socialism. When Shaw discovered the Fabian Society in 1884, its ideology of "permeation," not violent revolution, appealed to him immediately. Run by middle-class intellectuals, the Fabians believed that "For the right moment you must wait . . . but when the time comes, you must strike hard" (Peters 8). According to this view, educated upper- and middle-class citizens could help the poor by debating reform strategies and discussing carefully planned social change. Although Wells joined the Fabians for a time, his view of them more closely resembled that of Margaret Harkness, who lived and

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worked among the poor. In her novel *In Darkest London* the labor mistress of a candy factory tells a Salvation Army officer:

I should like to “take off” the Fabian Society, but I will not do it. They are well-meaning people, who listen to a lecture every fortnight, and when it is done tear the lecturer to bits and flap their little wings over his carcass. (130)

In his autobiography, Wells recalled the Fabians in similar terms, stressing their unwillingness to accept real social transformation. “A vast revolution was going on swiftly and irresistibly all around us,” he wrote, “But with perfect sincerity this Fabian group posed as a valiant little minority projecting a revolution reduced to its minimum terms. It was to permeate the existing order rather than change it” (198). The transformations of *Pygmalion* and *Doctor Moreau* suggest different visions of social change, one based on penetrating education, the other on an outbreak of repressed violence. When education is offered in response to demand, it can have positive—though not guaranteed—results; when it is mercilessly imposed, it will be rejected.

Eliza’s “conversion” in *Pygmalion* is often seen as a triumph of education, showing how easily social boundaries can be crossed (Porten 73). Significantly, though, Shaw’s play represents two transformations (three, if one counts Clara’s conversion by Wells), and in the second (Doolittle’s), language and education play no part. The presence of this second, equally painful metamorphosis, Lili Porten argues, indicates that education is “neither necessary nor sufficient for social mobility” (76). In a political lecture in 1913, the year *Pygmalion* was first performed on stage, Shaw quipped, “you cannot equalize anything about human beings except their incomes” (qtd. in Porten 81). Like his play, this remark suggests that education will do no good if offered only to randomly selected individuals. As a Fabian, he believed that education could produce lasting change, but only if it took the social environment into account.

Wells’s novella, which is not apparently about social change at all, offers a different vision of society. In his preface to the 1924 Atlantic edition Wells wrote:

This story was the response of an imaginative mind to the reminder that humanity is but animal rough-hewn to a reasonable shape and in perpetual conflict between instinct and injunction. This story embodies this ideal, but apart from this embodiment

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it has no allegorical quality. It is written just to give the utmost possible vividness to that conception of men as hewn and confused and tormented beasts. (qtd. in Batchelor 17–18)

Despite Wells's protests, *Doctor Moreau* does invite allegorical readings, resonating with contemporaneous works about science. For good reason, Roslynn Haynes has called Moreau "both an individual scientist and an allegory of the evolutionary process" ("Wells's Debt" 40), and Leon Stover has observed that "the Beast Folk are . . . representative of mankind at its present stage of evolutionary transition" (14). Thus on one level, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is about the human condition, about the pain caused by social laws crushing animal instincts. At the same time, it depicts a gory, chaotic political rebellion against a sadistic dictator—the overthrow of a privileged theorizer who disregards the agony around him. Moreau's education penetrates—and it penetrates deep. If Wells' novella is about social class as well as evolution—as his science fiction generally is—it suggests that change must address the environment to which the poor have adapted. It cannot occur from the top down (as offered by Moreau, a perverted Fabian), but only from the bottom up (as offered incoherently by the rebellious beast folk). And as long as the upper classes debate reform tactics without offering genuine systemic change, they are risking a bloody massacre.

Even with these contrasting visions of social change, *Doctor Moreau* and *Pygmalion* give readers a similar impression. Moreau tries to make humans of animals and fails; Higgins tries to pass a working-class girl off as an aristocrat and succeeds, only to learn that the qualities necessary for her transformation involve more than language. In both cases, changes to individuals cause little but misery when the experimenters fail to consider what these changes will mean in the context of the creatures' daily lives. As Eliza recognizes, "The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated" (95). Moreau's beast folk talk for a while, and Eliza promises to remain articulate for life. But for these creatures' living conditions to improve, it will take a lot more than phonetics. It will take an education that recognizes the full reality of their environments from their own point of view.

"Monsters manufactured," Moreau calls his subjects, "animals carven and wrought into new shapes" (46). Like Frankenstein's creature, they are cast into a world not ready for them, suffering greatly in the process. Eliza and the beast folk are eerily similar, coping with "improvements"

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conceived in laboratories that cause anguish and confusion in the world outside. Written by authors who transformed themselves, *Pygmalion* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* gesture at the monkeys in the writers' mirrors. With an ironic look back at their origins, they created art about the agony of change.

Notes

1. Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* between March and June 1912. It was first performed in Vienna in October 1913, then in London in April 1914. He added the sequel in 1916 to prevent readers and audiences from thinking that Eliza Doolittle eventually married Henry Higgins (Greene xvii; Holroyd 2: 332–40).

2. Shaw's wording here recalls Wells's affairs with intellectual women, which disrupted the Fabian Society to which they both belonged for a time (Shaw and Wells 37–52).

3. On 8 September 1897 Shaw wrote to the actress Ellen Terry:

[Everything else] has been driven clean out of my head by a play I want to write to them in which he [Forbes Robertson] shall be a west end gentleman and she [Mrs. Patrick Campbell] an east end dona in an apron and three orange and red ostrich feathers.

(qtd. in Holroyd 2: 296)

Arthur Ganz points out how true Shaw remained to this vision, since in the stage directions, when Eliza comes to Higgins's laboratory, she is wearing "a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky-blue, and red" (Shaw 25; Ganz 99).

4. *Pygmalion*'s subtitle is "A Romance in Five Acts." Wells's science fiction novellas of the 1890s were called "scientific romances" (Smith 57).

5. The scene in which Mrs. Pearce bathes Eliza was omitted in most performances.

6. Several critics have compared Moreau and Higgins to Frankenstein, although until now, to my knowledge, none have compared these two scientists to each other. Examining the myths that Wells incorporated into *Doctor Moreau*, Roger Bowen asserts that "The transition from 'spell' to 'surgery,' from magician to doctor . . . hinges on Mary Shelley's experimenter, Victor Frankenstein" (321). Roslynn Haynes observes that "Moreau resembles Frankenstein . . . in cutting himself off from the structures and values of society" (*From Faust to Strangelove* 155). Among the scholars who have compared Higgins to Frankenstein are Arthur Ganz, Lili Porten, and Michael Holroyd. According to Ganz, Higgins "fails terribly, much as his nineteenth-century predecessor did,

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to recognize the responsibilities of a creator/parent" (105). Porten points out how closely the Pygmalion myth (in which sympathetic gods animate an ivory statue) resembles the creation of life depicted in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (71). Holroyd notes, "This is a live experiment we are shown on stage, and as with all such laboratory work it is necessary for the Frankenstein doctor to behave as if his creation were insentient" (2: 326).

7. Bruce Clarke has called Dr. Moreau's beast people the "progeny" of Darwin's *Descent of Man* (55).

8. Of course, in presenting language as a continuum, Shaw, and to some degree also Wells, places working-class language toward the animal end.

9. Shaw specifies that Higgins is "not a portrait of Sweet" (*Pygmalion* 6), but Sweet, whom Shaw knew personally, was certainly an important source. Shaw's biographers Michael Holroyd and Archibald Henderson both believed that Higgins was based on Sweet. See Holroyd 2: 325–26 and Eisenbud 442.

10. Lili Porten argues against reading *Pygmalion* as an educational success story, proposing that its representation of education is ambiguous.

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The Evolutionary Invention of Race: W. E. B. Du Bois's "Conservation" of Race and George Schuyler's *Black No More*

Dana Carluccio

For humanities scholars debating the contours of W. E. B. Du Bois's notoriously conflicted account of racial identity, the field of evolutionary psychology has seemed completely irrelevant. Similarly, the experts busy debating evolutionary psychology's claims would not consider it particularly interesting that Du Bois offered a conflicted account of racial identity. This essay argues that both groups are mistaken, and that twentieth-century debates over racial identity and twenty-first-century debates over the study of human psychology have suffered as a result. Writers like Du Bois, I argue, were steeped in notions of evolutionary psychology, so our account of them and of their historical moment will be profoundly skewed if we ignore that discipline. By the same token, these writers' work can offer us new perspectives on how we debate this controversial discipline, and more broadly how we understand the relationship of biology to culture at stake in it.

Evolutionary psychology, which uses principles of Darwinian evolutionary theory to make and test predictions about human psychology, has become astonishingly popular over the last twenty-five years, both as a research program and as a pop culture phenomenon. Its proliferating publishing venues, academic societies, and textbooks are echoed by journalism, novels, and movies that have trumpeted the field's hypotheses, making them as ubiquitous in US culture today as psychoanalytic notions, such as Freudian slips.¹ Someone who has never heard of evolutionary psychology is nonetheless likely to believe that men find physical cues of

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female fertility (like youth) attractive because it helps them pass on their genes. The popularity of such claims has done little to secure their acceptance. Critics charge that evolutionary psychologists create too simple or direct a link between biology and complex psychological or sociological phenomena. And although titles like *The Triumph of Sociobiology* suggest that the field has emerged victorious from these debates, the Center for Evolutionary Psychology at the University of California Santa Barbara (home to two of the field's most influential members) tells a different story: it maintains an active website that, like an election-season war room, assembles responses to emerging criticisms (Cosmides and Tooby).²

Perhaps because of the field's current aura of both glamour and threat, scholars have paid little attention to its own evolution. The notion of an evolutionary psychology actually arose along with Darwinism in the late nineteenth century, much earlier than the 1975 academic birth usually marked by the publication of E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology*. Yet scholars have only just begun to unpack the cultural development of the principles that coalesced into this academic field, and virtually no attention has been paid to the relation between its cultural and academic practices. In particular, questions of the relation of biology to human behavior arise nowhere more insistently than in debates over race in the early twentieth century. The demise of comparative anatomy, the development of relativist forms of cultural anthropology, and the development of evolutionary theory itself have already been explored as contexts for those debates, but their relationship to evolutionary psychology remains to be acknowledged.³

This essay investigates this relationship by turning to two writers who epitomize the potentially polarizing complexity of questions about racial identity: Du Bois and George Schuyler. Du Bois has become a famous example of a thinker who tried and failed to generate a nonbiological account of race. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah's influential analysis, Du Bois's "The Conservation of Races" rejected the biological or "scientific" meaning of race only to insist on neat divisions of racial history that would be incoherent without that biological meaning propping them up. In Appiah's analysis, only biological community can yield those "common histor[ies]" that align properly with racial identity, making Du Bois's attempt to reject biology but preserve race circular ("Uncompleted Argument" 27). If Du Bois's argument can work only by appealing to a bankrupt biological category on the one hand or to a conceptual circle on the other, it would indeed seem to be "uncompleted," as Appiah puts

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it. Jane Kuenz's reading of Schuyler, on the other hand, examines an opposing danger of incompleteness. Kuenz argues that Schuyler's assault on the notion of Negro art makes a "typical conservative mistake of only going halfway" (174): it acknowledges the "primacy of environment and history" in generating racial forms but then bizarrely discounts that primacy's significance by dismissing race, implying that any product of history is inherently meaningless. Kuenz turns Schuyler's thinking into a cautionary tale for why we should not interpret the incoherence of race as a convincing argument against its deployment as an analytic tool.

The tension between Du Bois's failed effort to conserve race and Schuyler's failed effort to dispense with it shapes scholarly debates about race in modernist and contemporary culture. This debate is firmly entrenched between scholars who hold with Appiah that anyone writing on race must be choosing between a bankrupt biology and a conceptual circle and those who believe that race can be described coherently and nonbiologically at the same time. Walter Benn Michaels's literary history *Our America* epitomizes the former camp, viewing the resuscitation of biology through "culture" as the problematic hallmark of American modernism. Both Michaels and Paul Gilroy agree with Appiah that, in part because of this biological contamination of culture, contemporary cultural claims about race make sense only to the extent that they appeal implicitly to a dismantled notion of biological inheritance.

On the other side, scholars who argue for the validity of race as a conceptual category have done so by questioning the assumed equivalence of biology and necessity. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, for example, have insisted pointedly that social categories are not mere illusions in comparison to biological categories.⁴ More recently, William E. Connolly has challenged the meaning of the term *biology* itself, arguing that revising the definition of this term so as not to equate it with direct genetic control of complex behavior would preclude the need to appeal either to discredited pseudoscience or to circular reasoning in order to talk about race.⁵ Connolly's view displaces the question of *whether* particular forms of experience are biological and replaces it with the question of *how* they are biological. He proposes that biology is multilayered, for instance, and describes some of its layers as directly racialized by culture within individual lifetimes.

This essay uses Du Bois's and Schuyler's approaches to evolutionary psychology to historicize constraints on such reconceptions of the bio-

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logical. While we routinely conceive of the late nineteenth century as a time of unreconstructed biological essentialism, and while we measure that period through the eyes of a late twentieth-century idea of social construction, many early twentieth-century thinkers believed that evolution supplied a middle term between these two frameworks.⁶ If evolution could explain how simple forms developed into the most complex of biological phenomena, it could explain the ultimate complexity, the human mind, and its creative and transformative powers. For modernist thinkers, I contend, evolution made it theoretically possible to argue for a racial biology that consisted not of a set of genetically controlled and fixed traits, like those Appiah has in mind,⁷ but an inevitable cognitive propensity to act *as if* such traits existed.

To come to terms with this view, this essay begins with the concept of adaptive function. Through this concept, I suggest, Du Bois located the inevitability of race in its usefulness rather than its coherence or stability. Such a functional account of race came to its apotheosis when combined with the capacity of evolutionary theory to explain cognitive habits as well as more traditionally embodied characteristics. This combination made it possible to create what I propose we call a cognitive fiction: that is, an account of the idea of race as functional. This essay then expands our understanding of this unique kind of fiction by reading George Schuyler's *Black No More*, a satire that dismisses all racial categories, as an attempt to explore such a notion. By attending to the logic of texts that self-consciously seek to interrogate cognitive fictions, we can appreciate that early twentieth-century notions of race escape some of our most entrenched descriptions of them, and we can use those notions to reframe interdisciplinary arguments about biology and culture today.

“The vastest and most ingenious invention for human progress”

“The Conservation of Races” points readers to Darwinian evolution as its framework early on, with references to Thomas Henry Huxley, the man popularly known as Darwin’s bulldog, and to “Darwin himself” (816). Du Bois tells us that these scientists have toppled “old” ideas of race, such as “the five-race scheme of [Johann] Blumenbach,” and thus represent the “final word of science, so far” on the issue of racialization. Far from

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rejecting scientific accounts of racial identity, Du Bois here aligns himself with these new scientific authorities, introducing Darwin as a figure who “himself said” something that Du Bois is about to say. This alignment calls us to examine Du Bois’s essay from an evolutionary perspective.

Such a perspective would recognize in the essay’s opening a trope common to turn-of-the-century evolutionary writing. A genetic-essentialist reading of Du Bois may read the essay’s opening references to “the hard limits of natural law” as an insistence on biological fixity, but this gesture actually belongs to early efforts to apply evolution as a theory of change to social forms. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* employs this rhetorical device by using “artificial selection” (animal breeding) to model “natural selection.”⁸ The analogy establishes a reverberating relationship between human control and natural processes that would influence subsequent efforts to use evolution as a social theory. An 1879 *Popular Science* essay by W. K. Brooks, for instance, applies evolutionary theory to gender psychology by asserting that we must determine the gendered products of natural selection, or the “laws of nature,” before we can knowledgeably manipulate those laws to achieve cultural change—in other words, we must determine “the [social] lines along which [human] progress is to be expected” (145). Francis Galton’s 1909 formulation of eugenics more directly invokes Darwin’s analogy: where Darwin used human selection as the pattern for natural selection, Galton reasons that “what Nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly” (42). Du Bois deploys this same trope when he notes that “any striving, no matter how intense and earnest, which is against the constitution of the world, is vain” (815)—a point that insists on natural law but also on its informed manipulation—that is, “striving.” Du Bois thus commits to an evolutionary perspective for what it reveals about potential avenues of change.

Du Bois makes the existence of race the condition of such change by telling readers that “There can be no doubt as to its [the race idea’s] efficiency as the vastest and most ingenious invention for human progress” (817). This statement’s sweeping confidence should stand out in an essay otherwise fraught with qualifications, but in fact those qualifications often obscure it. Critics have focused on the passage immediately before, for instance, which tells us that a race is “a vast family of human beings, *generally* of common blood and language, *always* of common history, traditions and impulses, who are *both voluntarily and involuntarily* striving together

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for the accomplishment of *more or less vividly conceived* ideals of life" (817, my emphasis). To be sure, this answer is slippery. The opening "generally" hedges the insistent "always," establishing the central conflict between "blood" and "history" that Appiah focuses on, and the attenuations go on to include volition and vividness of conception.⁹ It is thus easy to read this passage on its own and conclude that Du Bois has no coherent definition of race, biological or cultural. But the language of "invention" that follows it suggests an effort to transcend these ambivalences, for *invention* has a Darwinian meaning that renders some of the tensions in Du Bois's definition of race irrelevant.

Darwinian evolution requires biological inventiveness in two key ways—a fact that Daniel C. Dennett depends on when he depicts the study of evolutionary processes as a kind of "reverse engineering" (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea* 212). First and most obviously, variations themselves are biological innovations. Second, Darwin often presents natural selection, the process by which certain variations persist, as an inventive force. While natural selection does not actually generate variations, Darwin suggests that it does dictate the directions in which variation can proceed, and that it thus elicits traits rather than just winnowing or eliminating them. As he puts it, selection is the process not just of "adding [variations] up" but of adding them "in a given direction" (*Origin* 112).¹⁰ In this way, natural selection can invent, as the oxymoronic anthropomorphism of the phrase suggests. Moreover, the inventions of natural selection obey a law of utility rather than of stable essence. Natural selection, that is, engineers traits that get a job done, not traits that are internally consistent or coherent. Thus we can read Du Bois's confidence that race is "the vastest and most ingenious invention of human progress" not as a strange counterpoint to his inability to scientifically define *race* but as a scientific definition of the term. Du Bois's establishment of evolution as the framework for his argument, coupled with his emphasis on "invention," invites us to see race as an evolved technology, one for which it makes less sense to inquire into essence than into efficiency. Race may be biological in this reading—part of the "hard limits of natural law" within which Du Bois insists racial politics must work—but it is not a stable set of traits.

To understand this model of biology, we need to recognize that Du Bois translates the question of what race is (the question to which Appiah devotes careful analysis) into the more pragmatic question of what it does—or as Du Bois puts it, the question of what "the function of race

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differences [has been] up to the present time” (819). His answer depends on another Darwinian concept: specialization. Darwin predicted that organisms that could thrive in their own unique environments would do better than organisms that could get by decently both in their own environments and in other potential environments. In other words, he predicted that natural selection would disfavor jack-of-all-trades organisms in favor of those that had mastered one trade. The concept of adaptation depends on this idea, and Darwin emphasizes it by faulting artificial selection for failing to be specialized enough:

Man keeps the natives of many climates in the same country; he seldom exercises each selected character in some peculiar and fitting manner; he feeds a long and a short beaked pigeon on the same food; he does not exercise a long-backed or a long-legged quadruped in any peculiar manner. (*Origin* 113)

For this reason, nineteenth-century evolutionary theorists often used the terms *specialization* or *peculiarities* synonymously with *adaptation*—including in discussions of race. In keeping with this view, Du Bois proposes that specialization is race’s evolutionary value. After favorably noting “the different roles which groups of men have played in Human Progress” (816), he argues that race allows individual groups to achieve such specialized roles: to “develop for civilization [their] unique message[s], [their] particular ideal[s], which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long” (819).

He does not suggest here that particular races are inherently good at particular things: he emphasizes *development*, a term that does not suggest natural capability; he emphasizes *ideals*, a term that also does not suggest any easy embodiment of what is to be developed; and perhaps most importantly, he uses the word *striving* to describe the development of these ideals—a term that he also uses to describe strenuous human efforts to enact evolutionary progress despite the limits of “natural law.” The emphasis on hard work suggests that racial community fosters a singularity of purpose that results in more specialized and therefore more finely honed achievements than would otherwise be possible, not that it creates people naturally suited to certain achievements. Du Bois also maintains throughout “The Conservation of Races” that the black race has not yet fully developed its own specialized contribution to the evolutionary progress of the human—a reason why it needs to be conserved.

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In this way, Du Bois's evolutionary analysis of race evokes Brian Boyd's recent evolutionary analysis of storytelling: the universalization of storytelling, according to Boyd, may stem from the capacity of stories to encourage intersubjective attentiveness to motive and intention, so that those who could conceive of stories would have had social advantages over those who could not. If race is an evolved technology in Du Bois's hands, it is in part a cognitive technology like storytelling, one that attunes people to each other and thus makes it easier for them to develop common goals. It is not an "essential difference" (815). We can thus see why Du Bois was comfortable with an account of race that melded biological and cultural history. Rather than simply reject biological accounts of racial identity—something that was hardly even an option at the turn of the twentieth century¹¹—Du Bois tackled a more nuanced and potentially more influential goal: he threw his weight behind a definition of biology that he believed did not threaten racial equality.

Du Bois's functional analysis of human psychology is not unique for his time. While *The Origin of Species* declined to apply natural selection to humans, *Descent of Man* did so with respect to psychological and not just physiological features. By the latter book's publication, Darwin had already inspired a growing group of philosophers and scientists to develop what was tentatively called evolutionary psychology.¹² What has not been recognized is that functionalist psychology makes storytelling more than a mere analogy for Du Bois's evolutionary account of race. This is because of how we use the idea of function. Adaptive functions do not presume stable essences, so they are to some extent insulated from empirical inconsistencies. As philosophers of science generally agree, for example, organs can have adaptive functions even when they aren't fulfilling them.¹³ Functional cognitive characteristics, I argue, acquire another layer of empirical insulation: once cognitive characteristics have functions, they can persist independently of their correlation to anything outside themselves. Thus the development of particular ideas or ways of viewing the world can persist even if those ideas or views do not precisely comport with the world they claim to respond to. People with functional ideas might behave as if those ideas were correct regardless of their accuracy or inaccuracy. This "as if" marks the intimacy between functionalist cognition and fiction.¹⁴ Although evolutionary theorists do not use the term *cognitive fictions*, they have recently deployed the logic I mean by this term to describe elements of human psychology ranging from religious experi-

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ence to the frequency of self-deception, hypothesizing that humans are hardwired to weave certain stories about cosmological origins or about themselves, even where the stories are contradicted or severely weakened by all the available evidence.¹⁵ Although evolutionary scientists have been reluctant to explicitly apply such logic to embodied identity, Du Bois's treatment of race does so.

The ambiguity of the very term *invention* points to this fact. The decidedly human character of this term (it's people who invent, with consciousness and design) persists alongside its cue to Darwinian meanings of variation and natural selection. Thus when Du Bois says that race is the greatest "invention" for human progress, his statement can refer both to a set of evolved characteristics and to the human investment of a set of characteristics with racial meaning. It can refer, in other words, to race as Du Bois finds it and to Du Bois's own impulse to conserve it. We can map these two meanings onto the biological account of race that Appiah sees Du Bois slipping into and the cultural account of race that would explain why he does so. But from an evolutionary perspective, we can also see the slippage between biology and culture as a point, not a problem. The notion that humans have evolved mechanisms that lead them to construct the world in certain ways and not in others is precisely the claim of evolutionary psychology. This notion can be right or wrong, but it entails no logical contradiction of the kind that Appiah diagnoses. From this perspective, Du Bois's persistent ambiguities suggest that the evolutionary invention of race may be precisely the same thing as the social propensity to invent race's importance. In other words, evolution may have invented an inclination toward organizing the world as if race existed, rather than having invented a stable set of racialized traits. Such innate inclinations are what I propose we call cognitive fictions.

This meaning reverberates in a suggestive passage that Eric Sundquist has described as the most important in Du Bois's essay (463). In this passage, Du Bois renames the invention of race, calling it "the race idea, the race spirit, the race ideal" (817). These terms are tricky in the same way that *invention* is, because each of them can refer to two distinct things: first, to a set of characteristics that can be posited of a race;¹⁶ and second, to the very notion (the "idea") of race. Preserving Du Bois's ambiguity suggests that the relation between these two possibilities is itself the notion that Du Bois's essay defends: that the evolutionary invention of race consists of the inclination to think in terms of the idea of race. Read in this light, it is

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significant that Du Bois tells us that race differences consist of “conscious striving” (818), and that races “stand for” the ideals they strive after, rather than simply embody them (819). Beyond a tendency toward racialized ideals, Du Bois does not seem to have any particular racialized cognitive capacities in mind. Ultimately, this interpretation makes it possible to see Du Bois defending race as neither a fixed biological essence nor an arbitrary social construction, but instead as an evolved psychological structure.

Du Bois was certainly not alone in hypothesizing that race had an evolutionary value, but his account does offer an unusual picture of what that value might be, which underlines the promise that he seems to have seen in cognitive fictions. Turn-of-the-century psychologists like G. Stanley Hall generally saw the value of race in its capacity to explain the progress of one individual race over another. By rejecting this interpretation and portraying the idea of race as valuable, Du Bois opens the door to a scientific defense of racial pluralism. His view joined the Spencerian notion of linear or teleological evolutionary progress (assumed in Hall’s argument) with a Darwinian model of branching evolution: the singular height of human progress would require many races to converge on civilization from many directions.

That innovation leads to a second argument that Du Bois did not make. Twentieth-century psychologists have established that people in the twentieth century reliably describe each other using three characteristics: age, race, and sex. Although the fact that people reliably do something does not automatically mean that it is biological, some psychologists have hypothesized that the presence of age, race, and sex as schemas in humans’ biological hardwiring could account for these empirical results. Moreover, psychologists interested in this hypothesis have suggested that a racial schema in particular could facilitate assessments of group belonging—of membership in in-groups and out-groups (although some evolutionary psychologists have challenged this view).¹⁷ If Du Bois saw such assessments of group belonging as the evolutionary value of race, then he should have seen race prejudice (against the out-group) as a key constituent of racial identity. But in fact, Du Bois claims that “race prejudice” is not as inevitable as his readers might believe. It is “nothing but the friction” resulting from differences in “ideals” of racial groups (821). The specialized creation of those ideals is for Du Bois the real evolutionary value of race.

Contemporary readers are likely to be uncomfortable with Du Bois’s account of racial identity as I have outlined it, for the history of racism

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makes the notion of an inescapable inclination to see the world in racial terms seem dangerous, despite Du Bois's protests. Such a notion can also seem empirically superfluous—for even if we were sympathetic to Du Bois's project, why could we not posit an innate and general cognitive capacity for shared specialization and assume that such a capacity might organize itself around any number of features, including geographical closeness or physical similarity, among other things? In other words, why do we need to posit a specific cognitive inclination toward race to explain race's historical development? The answer is surely that we do not: we are free to conclude that Du Bois was wrong, and we have ample reason to do so. But to stop at this conclusion would be to waste the full opportunity of his essay. While an attention to evolutionary concepts can tease out new assumptions and assertions in Du Bois's argument, we can also use his argument to reconsider continuing controversies over just those concepts, as well.

Specifically, Du Bois's argument allows us to reconsider the way we conduct debates over the claims of evolutionary psychology. To start off, it challenges our habit of seeing biology and culture as stark alternatives in analyses of human behavior. There is of course a long history of asking whether certain elements of human experience are biological or cultural, and we see that history in Appiah's analysis of Du Bois's work. Yet the nuances of Du Bois's argument demand that we ask another question as well: not whether race is biological, but in what way Du Bois conceives of biology. To ask only the former question is to insist on a false choice, for insofar as humans do not exist outside of their bodies, there is really no such thing as nonbiological experience. This fact motivates Steven Pinker's exasperation with scientific journals and newspaper articles that profess to be astonished to find that learning physically alters the structure of the brain: "Good thing," Pinker tells us, "because otherwise we would be permanent amnesiacs" (*Blank Slate* 86). Writing on racial identity, William Connolly makes a similar point: the body is racialized even if language, socioeconomics, and history are part of the process that racializes it. We may want to ask whether something is *genetically* biological or not, but even this question is something of a false choice, for all biology starts off with bits of nucleic acids—genes—and so it is all genetic in some way, while none of it is entirely so. Thus the question is not whether experience is biological, but how. The demand that we might ultimately make of Du Bois's answer (do we really need to posit a specific inclination toward

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race?) acknowledges exactly this point: it concedes for a moment that perhaps we can analyze the biological mediation of a cultural category but asks whether a particular way of describing that mediation is the best one available.

This step gets us very close to debating the claims that lie at the heart of evolutionary psychology today. As Pinker's remarks suggest, proponents and critics of this field also do not argue over whether human behavior is biological, but over what form that biology takes. And more often than not, this means arguing over how capacious or narrow we should take that form to be. For example, philosophers and psychologists have traditionally posited that people have a capacity for general reasoning and an aptitude for learning that makes culture possible and significant—a parallel to the idea that humans have a general cognitive capacity for sharing specialized purposes that may be organized in various ways. On the other hand, evolutionary psychologists have more recently proposed that humans have highly specific mental modules that greatly narrow and constrain the range of what they can learn and do—a parallel to the idea that humans have an innate cognitive capacity for something as specific as race. When humanities scholars deploy the term *biology* as if it were an option, we may reinforce a cultural rhetoric that can distort these two approaches, making the former approach seem like the cultural one and the latter seem synonymous with biology. That way of talking may narrow definitions of biology in a way that forecloses debates over how the term should be defined.

This problem is particularly pressing because debates over evolutionary psychology often lack awareness of rhetorical issues. Participants on all sides of disagreements over contemporary evolutionary psychology too frequently separate important rhetorical questions from empirical questions to which they are intimately related. Because both groups are leery of the hardwired reading of race that I have argued Du Bois presents, Du Bois's essay can present a neutral ground on which to recognize this point. I have argued that Du Bois presents an evolutionary and functionalist account of race as a hardwired cognition. Yet I have also noted that the language Du Bois actually uses is "idea"—the evolutionary value of race is the evolutionary value of "the race idea." That phrase has a significant rhetorical effect: it conflates the notion of evolved capacity with the notion of evolved content. It is possible to argue that people have the evolved capacity to share specialized purposes, and even that this capacity

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has evolved to be strongly triggered by observations of inherited or rough physical similarities. It is also possible to argue that people have a built-in notion of race. But these two versions of the claim do not say exactly the same thing. The first version focuses on a diffuse set of biologically mediated procedures. The second focuses on a congealed and biologically mediated outcome. The choice we must confront in Du Bois's essay is thus not just a choice between fixed biology and malleable social construction; there is also an unacknowledged choice between two ways of describing biology. And although the demand we are most likely to make of Du Bois's argument would skip over this rhetorical point in favor of an empirical question, that movement artificially narrows the debate back to biology and culture. In effect, asking whether something is biological has the unintended consequence of reinforcing a traditional and quite hardened definition of that term.

By returning to the contemporary example of intelligence, we can see how attention to such rhetorical issues can reframe debates over biology, culture, and human experience. Proponents and critics of evolutionary psychology alike make rhetorical choices that foreclose the possibility of full debate over their positions. Evolutionary psychologists take the position that humans do not have a generalized ability to perform self-conscious logical operations in open-ended and culturally determined situations, but instead have the narrow ability to blindly and intuitively analyze the logical constraints of very particular scenarios, such as a scenario in which one must detect social rule breaking, or cheating. The evidence for this claim is that in experimental situations, fewer people correctly identify logically falsifying conditions when propositions concern abstract rules (like rules about relationships of arbitrarily selected numbers and letters) than when they concern rules about social scenarios (such as rules that require someone to be a member of a certain group in order to have access to certain resources). The interpretation of these experimental results is highly technical and sharply contested, and I will not adjudicate the contest here. Instead, I wish to examine the rhetoric through which the interpretation is described. Typically, proponents and critics alike use the phrase *cheater detection* to describe the evolutionary psychology position.¹⁸ In other words, people are hypothesized to have a mental module that detects rule breakers. Like Du Bois's "race idea," this phrase translates cognitive capacity into cognitive content: at a rhetorical level, it implies that the mind has the concept of cheater built into it and

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that it runs checks for environmental matches, much like face recognition software scanning a crowd for a particular image. Yet this is a rhetorical gambit, and it is not essential for describing the idea in question. If we were to grant evolutionary psychologists' interpretation of their results purely for the sake of argument, we could just as well restate it by saying that the human mind is generally capable of performing informal logic tasks, but that its ability seems to be sensitized or primed in social situations. The only difference is that we have not translated capacity into content. Admittedly, this rhetorical point is not likely to satisfy either proponents or critics of evolutionary psychology, all of whom are more concerned with asking whether or not its claims are correct; but my point is that when we fail to examine such rhetorical issues, we constrain our sense of what evolutionary psychology might be correct or incorrect *about*, and this constraint gives an unearned advantage to hardened definitions of the biological.

Ultimately, this fact impacts not just questions about rule breaking but also questions about race and gender. Du Bois's willingness to apply the logic of cognitive fictions to embodied identity anticipates but also exceeds contemporary evolutionary psychology in this regard, for while evolutionary psychologists deploy the logic of cognitive fictions to talk about things like religion and self-deception, they have claimed to be much more committed to a brain that reflects the body where race and gender are concerned. Various branches of science have long challenged notions of racial biology, for example, and evolutionary psychologists have correspondingly claimed to debunk the notion that race is a hardwired part of the mind.¹⁹ Research into gender biology, on the other hand, continues to thrive, and—using Robert Trivers's theory of parental investment—evolutionary psychologists have enthusiastically insisted that human psychology must duplicate biological differences.²⁰ In fact, researchers often trade the rejection of race for the securing of sex: race is nowhere near as coherent a category as sex, Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides tell us. If we follow Du Bois's cue in recognizing various definitions of biology, however, we can create alternative possibilities *within* biology for reconceiving of race and gender without trading them against each other.

Although we can thus get quite a lot out of Du Bois's essay, "The Conservation of Races" is ultimately only suggestive of the notion of cognitive fictions, its power and problems. Du Bois's argument points to

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a way of reading race that escapes the binary oppositions on which his logic may in some places seem to founder. More specifically, it draws on a functional mode of analysis that enables that escape and gestures toward the application of that functional analysis to human thought as its ultimate fulfillment. Yet to confirm the cultural significance of this notion of race, we have to look at other texts. The rest of this essay proposes that we can find such confirmation by looking at texts that seek to dispense with race both at the level of biological essence and of cultural construction, but nonetheless script race's continual resuscitation. There are few better examples of such texts than George Schuyler's *Black No More*. By turning to it, we can begin to recognize both the early twentieth-century pervasiveness of this evolutionary model of racial identity and to better understand those evolutionary psychological principles that it draws on and are still at work today.

“Getting rid of [race]”

Like Du Bois, Schuyler assumes that evolution is an engine and engineer of human social institutions. He offers evidence for that view in the novels *Black Empire* and *The Black Internationale*, published serially under the name of Samuel I. Brooks. This pair of black nationalist science fiction novels depicts the two-part evolutionary process that W. K. Brooks, Galton, and Du Bois present, in which humans must recognize natural law in order to manipulate it. In Schuyler's hands, a concerted scientific study of human civilization results in its complete racial reinvention, including the African overthrow of European colonial power and the replacement of it by a futuristic utopia. In this account of large-scale social engineering Schuyler pauses to offer an account of the relevance of evolutionary theory to psychological structure. His journalist alter ego contends:

We have to become conditioned to our changed environment almost over night, historically speaking. Physically, we live in the Twentieth Century; psychologically, we live many thousands of years ago. We come into this world made for life as huntsman or herdsman and find ourselves in an environment of whirling machines, confusion upon confusion for the sake of order, complications and responsibilities and temptations that try the hardest souls and often leave them balanced precariously on the precipice of insanity. (*Black Empire* 94)

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Schuyler's time scale is off (even "many thousands" underestimates), but he captures the kernel of evolutionary psychology: that is, the method of using an evolutionary history that has fit us for past circumstances in order to understand the parameters of present psychological possibilities. However, where Du Bois sees a continued function for such parameters, Schuyler views evolution not just as a source of progress but as a way people can become psychologically stuck, acquiring hardwired habits that are soon outstripped by the pace of human cultural change that makes people perennially maladaptive.²¹

Black No More makes a sustained effort to narrate this view by picking up with the psychological question that Schuyler poses at the end of his essay "The Negro-Art Hokum." In that piece he berates his audience for committing itself to incoherent notions of racial identity—identities that he describes using the term *peculiarities*, the same term evolutionary scientists used to refer to biological specializations. He closes the essay by punning exasperatedly on the word *hokum* to wonder "how come" a commitment to race persists despite the incoherence of the concept (663). *Black No More* works as an extended narrative thought experiment in answering just this question. Schuyler begins the experiment with Dr. Junius Crookman's invention of an electrochemical treatment called Black-No-More that claims to eliminate racial difference by turning blacks white—or as the novel's protagonist and one of the first people to undergo the treatment puts it, to be "getting rid of the Negroes upon whom all of the blame was placed for the backwardness of the South" (44). This protagonist, Max Disher/Matthew Fisher, facetiously reproduces Schuyler's exasperated confusion when he claims to be "puzzled" by the fact that newspapers and businessmen would be "bitterly opposed" to such "efforts to bring about chromatic democracy" (44), suggesting that they would prefer to remain stuck with a problem that they could seemingly eliminate.

Of course, the very idea that eliminating race as a category of analysis is the same thing as eliminating blackness is one of the targets of Schuyler's satire. But to understand the novel's analysis of racial politics, we need to recognize that Schuyler actually does claim to eliminate race in its pages. Yet it is not the Black-No-More treatment that produces this result. Rather, Schuyler comes up with another device that does achieve that goal—genealogical research. In an effort to maintain white supremacy, Arthur Snobbcraft—a leader of the Anglo-Saxon Association—commis-

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sions a study that seeks to recover the genotypical truth of race behind the superficial phenotypical alterations made possible by Black-No-More. However, the project winds up implicating the wrong people's genotypes: as Snobbcraft discovers with horror, he and many other white supremacists have black ancestors themselves. In his quest to locate a secure site of the whiteness that he takes for granted, Snobbcraft's project instead forces him to confront the insecurity of anyone's identification with whiteness—even that of the people defending its exclusions.²² His project thus becomes a more powerful challenge to white supremacy than Black-No-More has ever been: it makes visible what Schuyler called the "Caucasian problem" in place of the purported "Negro problem." Because Snobbcraft's discovery puts him in the same position as the users of Black-No-More, it also exposes that they both share the same white supremacist assumptions. This commonality reinforces a contention Schuyler made in his broader writings on race: that his peers' harboring a debasing desire for whiteness motivated their use of skin-lightening creams. Ultimately, then, Snobbcraft's elimination of whiteness ratchets up the satirical quality of the Black-No-More phenomenon as a representation of such behavior.

It is not entirely surprising, then, that Schuyler invests greater power to undermine racial categories in Snobbcraft's discovery than in Crookman's invention. Where Crookman's treatment leads only to new opportunities for racial exploitation, Schuyler endorses the positive possibilities of Snobbcraft's discovery in saccharine terms that test satiric conventions. His portrayal of Matt Fisher's wife Helen as a stand-in for the supposedly dramatic post-Snobbcraft shift in the national white psyche encapsulates his endorsement. Minutes after giving birth to an unexpectedly dark-skinned infant, Helen learns from her father, who brandishes a newspaper announcing the claim, that Snobbcraft's research has implicated her own family's racial ancestry. The emotional upheaval following this news yields to melodramatic indifference when Helen learns that her husband has been black much more recently than she:

There was no feeling of revulsion. . . . There once would have been but that was seemingly centuries ago when she had been unaware of her remoter Negro ancestry . . . Compared to what she possessed, thought Helen, all talk of race and color was damned foolishness. (154)

The naïveté of Helen's response may seem to set her up for Schuyler's

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trademark disdain. However, it also harkens back to the sarcastic dedication of Schuyler's novel to those white Americans, like Helen herself, who imagine themselves to be untainted by black "blood"—specifically, those "Caucasians in the great republic who can trace their ancestry back ten generations and confidently assert that there are no Black leaves, twigs, limbs or branches on their family trees" (xvii). Schuyler and Helen are thus in sympathy here, and in an often-overlooked moment, he legitimates Helen's response. The narrator declares wearily that Helen "would probably have been surprised to learn that countless Americans at that moment were thinking the same thing [she was]" (154). This remark draws attention to the narrator's omniscience against Helen's ignorance; however, the omniscient narrator leaves Helen's emotional experience unchallenged. This scene thus announces a narratological experiment in the elimination of race as a category of analysis; Snobbcraft's genealogy makes all talk of race and color seem foolish.²³

Schuyler endorses this conclusion by quickly adding Dr. Brocker to the "countless Americans" in question. The doctor has been an arbiter of racial definition in Helen's hospital room, linked to the narrator's omniscience when he "smile[s] knowingly" at Matt's revelation of his racial past. Yet he too claims to slough off the nation's racialized history in one fell swoop, announcing cheerfully that "I'm in the same boat with the rest of you. . . . I sure hope the Republicans win" (155). Schuyler's experiment continues by abruptly breaking off and then picking up again four years later, "in the last days of the Goosie administration" (176), at a moment when the entire country has become suddenly absorbed by skin color "again." The long narrative break and that last word "again" inform us that the social indifference to race imagined in Helen's hospital room is supposed to have lasted through all four years of the Republican's term.

The fact that the novel allows one of its challenges to racial identity to work—that is, to effectively eliminate race—is often overlooked or even rejected in readings of the novel. In an otherwise persuasive account of racial capitalism in *Black No More*, Sonnet H. Retman suggests that it would be a mistake "to read [Helen's] transformation as indicative of a larger shift in attitude on the part of the public" (1458). Yet this reading is precisely the one Schuyler instructs us—through his reference to "countless Americans"—to adopt. The most obvious source of Retman's oversight is that race is, after all, only temporarily eliminated in the novel, leading to an end in which, as Schuyler tells us, it is "again" in full force.

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That ending seems to signal Schuyler's indefatigable cynicism,²⁴ and to suggest that we should not take what transpires in Helen's hospital room seriously. Yet we gain something by acknowledging the success that Schuyler scripts in that room along with its ephemeral quality. Specifically, we gain a fuller understanding of the sources of Schuyler's cynicism and the paradoxical account of racial identity that motivates it.

To see how, we also need to recognize that just as the Black-No-More treatment does not actually eliminate racial hierarchy (Snobbcraft's genealogy performs that task), so it cannot really explain its resuscitation either. In *Black No More's* truncated afterword, titled "And so on and so on" (176), Crookman discovers that his treatment turns dark skin several shades paler than the skin of people who were originally "white"; this discovery, Schuyler claims, is what "start[s] the entire country examining shades of skin color again" (177). Yet this claim plays a conceptual shell game with the novel's double assault on race. Crookman's treatment is the novel's first and failed assault on racial identity; the second assault, Snobbcraft's genealogical project, is the successful one. For that reason, Crookman's closing discovery shouldn't matter, because it undermines the mechanics only of the novel's unsuccessful assault on race. It intervenes, in other words, in a debate that Snobbcraft's project has rendered moot: the fact that previously black Americans now have lighter skin than white Americans is irrelevant once these two racial positions have themselves been rendered incoherent, as Schuyler, Helen, and Dr. Brocker insist they have—and as the novel's most explicit racist, Henry Givens, acknowledges with the claim that "we're all niggers now" (156). By not acknowledging this incommensurability between the retirement and the reinstatement of racial hierarchies, the narrative comes to depend on a logical gap of the kind that Appiah diagnoses in "The Conservation of Races": that is, the ending requires the novel to return in an apparently illogical way to a category that it had seemed to write itself out of.

Schuyler's narrative makes it very difficult to appeal to either traditional biological explanations or to cultural explanations of its paradoxical return to race. On the one hand, Schuyler's depiction of white as the new black leaves any stable biology of race in tatters. On the other, the novel's brief gesture toward history as an explanation for its closing turn of events is openly facetious. "To a society that had been taught to venerate whiteness for over three hundred years," the narrator intones, "[Crookman's] announcement was rather staggering. What was the world coming

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to, if the blacks were whiter than the whites?" (177). The narrator's "three hundred years" cues us to the oppressive weight of history's prioritization of whiteness, but what the world quickly comes to is a sudden national interest in darkening skin. The oppressive weight of history is thus supposed to explain only that element of race's resurgence—skin color—that is about to prove most malleable. According to this line of reasoning, history invests whiteness with so much importance that Americans must actually reject it—a state of affairs that only undermines cultural explanation. Finally, the closing return to race is also not guaranteed by capitalist markets that produce racialized consumers and commodities alike. While Retman is right to observe that "racial difference is too enmeshed in the markets . . . to be easily effaced" (1456), that fact raises the question of how the market for race is suddenly reconstituted once Schuyler asks us to accept that the beliefs driving it and the institutional apparatus abetting it have indeed been largely effaced—however uneasily.

It is possible, of course, to generate a variety of plausible explanations for the return to race at the novel's end. The most obvious might be that people find race an expedient way of preserving social privileges to which they have become accustomed and to which they would like to return. Yet the characters' resuscitation of race does not always seem as cynical as this reading would suggest. It begins with their becoming personally concerned over the possibility of bearing "evidence of [their own] possession of Negro blood" (177)—an unself-conscious, affective appeal that simply takes discredited social meanings of whiteness and blackness for granted rather than longing to bring them back. This appeal reverts unthinkingly to a concern with individual relationships to whiteness and blackness, seeming to forget that to have "once been a member of a pariah class" (177) no longer refers only to individual shifts in racial belonging but in fact to a social shift in the very meanings of the categories to which one might belong. The characters' unthinking reversion to an outmoded racial model suggests that the conscious desire for historically racial privilege is not a complete explanation for what goes on at the novel's end.

The evolved psychology that Schuyler discusses in *Black Empire* offers a good candidate for modeling the less strategic elements of that return to race. When Schuyler became discouraged late in his career with what he considered essentializing black appeals to racial identity, he referred condescendingly to those appeals as "racial fictions" ("Rising Tide" 106); in what follows, I will argue that *cognitive* racial fictions help account for the

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novel's end. Schuyler does very little in *Black No More* to explain explicitly how he gets from the hospital scene that eliminates race to the afterword that resuscitates it. However, a brief section does intervene between the two, and the title of Schuyler's ending—"And so on and so on"—points us back to it as an explanation for the novel's close. I will argue that this section not only revolves around cognitive fictions but also connects them firmly to the persistence of race. Examining the novel through this three-part structure suggests that the desire of US citizens to restore race is the product of an evolved habit of thinking in racial terms, one that makes racial identity hardwired, ineluctable, and artificial at once.

Racial fictions

What intervenes between Schuyler's narrative elimination and resuscitation of race is a disturbingly macabre tale of the ironically named Happy Hill, Mississippi. Like the larger novel, this tale begins by recording the white anger over *Black-No-More* that Matthew Fisher observed, with the narrator reporting that "the news that all Negroes had disappeared . . . had been received with sincere regret by the inhabitants of Happy Hill" (165). The tale ends with an act of extreme racial violence that is largely indifferent to the race of its victims, an indifference that anticipates the resuscitation of whiteness through blackness that will take place in the novel's postscript. The interlude thus seems to act as a literal microcosm of the novel's overall arc. Because that microcosm is offered up between the two moments that generate that overall arc's apparent logical inconsistency, I propose that we read this section as a key to how that inconsistency is resolved.

While *Black No More* as a whole raises the question "how come" posed at the end of "The Negro-Art Hokum," the interlude of life in Happy Hill returns to the psychological answer proposed in that earlier text. At one of his most cynical moments, Schuyler speculates in "The Negro-Art Hokum" that the best account of people's refusal to reject race is that most Americans, white and black alike, are simply and constitutionally incapable of reasoned thought: "[racial] reasoning may seem conclusive to the majority of Americans," he concedes, but "it must be rejected with a loud guffaw by intelligent people" (99). This misanthropic speculation resurfaces in Schuyler's condescension toward the intellectual capacities of the residents of his archetypical Southern town. Schuyler

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features the town's "inordinately high illiteracy rate," for example, on a list of things "the community might have boasted of" (164). The sense of intellectual inadequacy becomes linked to the townspeople's racial reasoning when Schuyler reports their inane confidence that "the people for miles around were with very few exceptions old residents and thence known to be genuine blue-blooded Caucasians for as far back as any resident could remember which was at least fifty years" (164).

Yet Schuyler's portrayal indicts Happy Hill's residents for more than simple ignorance. We begin to see its more specific character in some of the most overbearingly ironic of the narrator's remarks, such as the implication that the community takes pride in ("might have boasted of") its illiteracy rate. Some of these remarks cross the narrator's and the characters' voices in a way that complicates the quality of the latter. For instance, the derisive portrayal of the residents' confidence in their ancestry acquires a breathless quality as it goes along, both because of its length and because it lacks punctuation—particularly before the "which" that introduces the most egregious piece of reasoning in the sentence. This breathlessness mixes sarcasm with what sounds like a spontaneous and sincere remark by one of the town's residents, creating the sense that the narrator's skepticism and the ignorance of "simple folk" (169) operating under the logic of "country people" (166) are actually intertwined in the residents of Happy Hill. In other words, Happy Hill's inhabitants are neither purely malevolent manipulators of racial discourses nor purely blind believers in them either. Instead, they seem compulsively indifferent to what Schuyler considers failures of "intelligent" reasoning—to the fact that they know they cannot coherently apply the categories toward which they're driven. This more complex depiction of what Schuyler considers the residents' cognitive deficiencies begins to capture the mechanics of cognitive fictions, which dictate that people think along certain lines even when they are capable of appreciating those lines' inaccuracy.

Schuyler most fully depicts this cognitive style only by taking an extended narrative detour into a bizarre religion that drives the novel's most extreme act of racial violence. Given the length of this narrative detour, its explicit link to racialized violence, and the similarities of this violence to the resuscitation of race at the novel's end, I suggest that this religious portrait is key to understanding the novel's analysis of race. The Reverend Alex McPhule, a rural counterpart to Matt Fisher, is responsible for Happy Hill's new religion, whose rituals pair built-in biological drives

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and transparent social inventions. Schuyler seems to have been influenced by the popularity of psychoanalysis in the US in the 1910s and 20s, and turns largely to notions of a human sex drive to model this pairing. Like the religion that Schuyler portrays in *Black Empire*, McPhule's religion revolves largely around that drive.²⁵ McPhule engineers individual sexual encounters and group sex scenes that involve most of the town's members, and his sermons descend into comical scenes of animalistic instinct, with him "run[ning] around on all fours" to "embrace in turn each member of the congregation" (167). At the same time that these scenes depict an uncontrolled devolution, they couple it with a highly self-conscious artificiality: the revivals take place "on the darkest nights with the place of worship dimly illuminated by pine torches," and "these torches always seemed to conveniently burn out about the time the embracing and rolling started" (167). In other words, Schuyler's descriptions stress the ingrained compulsiveness and the artificial expendability of McPhule's rituals. They are ingrained and compulsive to the extent that McPhule has not invented the drives that he manipulates; the narrator reinforces that fact by reporting that "the majority of [the Reverend's individual partners] were middle-aged wives and adenoidal and neurotic young girls" (168). They are artificial and expendable, though, in the sense that McPhule's religion invents obviously arbitrary channels for those drives to work through. Thus the narrator reports that "every latchstring hung out" for the Reverend, so that "when the men were at work in the fields, [he] could visit . . . and comfort the womenfolk with his Christian message" (167). Schuyler's tale of Happy Hill, then, stresses social deceptions as an outlet for, or exploitation of, built-in compulsions.

The fact that Schuyler creates McPhule and lingers so long over his role in Happy Hill at such a crucial moment in the narrative suggests the relevance of his religion's mechanics to Schuyler's interest in the persistence of race. Schuyler explicitly connects these two things when McPhule yokes his religion to a lynching that depends on an ad hoc redefinition of its victims' racial identity. By using McPhule's religious rituals as the context for the town's final racial act, Schuyler makes the biological drive run amok key to understanding the townspeople's racial experience. He specifically incorporates the artificiality and expendability of McPhule's rituals into that experience, stressing the self-conscious distortions on which both religious and racial ritual depend (and indeed conflating those distortions at the tale's end). Schuyler thus uses the interlude of Happy

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Hill to turn a narratological experiment in eliminating race into a theory of race as a biological compulsion. As in “The Conservation of Races,” race depends on an as-if structure. It becomes little more than a ravenous impulse to interpret and respond to the world in racially hierarchical terms, indeed a compulsion to distort what Schuyler in *Black Empire* called the “physical world” in order to fit those terms. Ultimately, insofar as the tale of Happy Hill models the narrative arc of *Black No More*, the novel makes Happy Hill’s link between cognitive fictions and race into an explanation of the novel’s own final racial act as well.

At first, McPhule’s own behavior establishes the centrality of an as-if structure. Thinking that he can use “a message straight from Heaven” to cement his religious monopoly over the town (168), McPhule simply invents a prophecy that such a message will appear, thus setting in motion a story that will both demand and explain the lynching in Happy Hill. He turns to newspapers to complete the research for his story: reading *The Warning* one day, he suddenly “got an idea. If the Lord would only send him a nigger for his congregation to lynch!” (168). He quickly weaves this plot device into his story, falsely informing the congregation that the Lord has conveyed to him what the message will be.²⁶ As the days go by and the message does not appear, McPhule becomes desperate, worrying that he has paced his narrative ineffectively. Yet of course he is saved by Schuyler, whose own storytelling has long set up the arrival of Snobbcraft and Buggerie at the perfect time. McPhule’s “if only!” ensures the ability to act “as if” when that time arrives. At this moment, the townspeople’s racial behavior becomes firmly indebted to an as-if structure as well. As the lynching unfolds, Happy Hill’s residents discover that the apparently black skin of the victims, Snobbcraft and Buggerie, consists only of dark shoe polish. They are openly “disappointed” to learn that the two men are white, only then to discover a newspaper account of Snobbcraft’s and Buggerie’s distant black ancestry, which they view as “sufficient excuse for doing what they had wanted to do at first” (174–75). The townspeople’s earlier limitation of the one-drop rule to a fifty-year shelf life makes their reliance on it in this scene seem expedient. The strange notion that racial identity would supply an excuse—as opposed to a reason—for racial violence underlines that expedience. Like McPhule, the townspeople have “got[ten] an idea” from the paper they read, and are now acting it out. Putting the sense of compulsion together with this sense of artificiality alters the novel’s depiction of just what race consists of in *Black No More*,

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suggesting that it is precisely a compulsion to think in racial terms regardless of what form those terms take.²⁷

To read what takes place in Happy Hill as a microcosm of the novel's overall arc is thus to emerge from this interlude with a notion of cognitive fictions that can account for the otherwise illogical move between the novel's narratological elimination of race as a category of analysis and its later resuscitation of it. If the strength of a traditionally conceived biology and of history are questioned at the novel's close, the strength of cognitive fictions has been established. The mechanics of this notion capture what is most inventive about the close of Schuyler's novel, including the willingness of Schuyler's full cast of characters to retire race one year and revive it the next. These mechanics also allow us to understand the existence of characters who are driven to know the world in always already racialized terms even as they empty their objects of knowledge of any coherent content. The novel's excision of four years from its narration draws attention to this paradox, sharply juxtaposing the characters' sudden shedding of race and their equally sudden embrace of it, as well as the strange reversal in the racial values they alight on. This turn of events mimics the movement of Happy Hill's residents from wishing to lynch blacks to wishing for an excuse to lynch whites. The result is that race in the novel more broadly becomes both resilient and hollow, a compelling idea rather than a set of specific characteristics. This relocation of the force of race duplicates the subtle meaning of Du Bois's reference to "the race idea"—the capacity of that phrase to refer to the very idea of race. The compulsion toward that idea seems to mean that if people cannot think without race, they can invent it—can act as if it exists—as they go along.

In keeping with the depiction of cognitive habits as central to racial hierarchies in Happy Hill, the epistemological relationship between the narrator and the larger cast of characters changes in the novel's afterword. Through most of *Black No More*, the narrator treats his characters with a distanced and knowing mockery, offering ironic juxtapositions that construct the narrator as sharp and jaded and puncture the characters' self-conceptions as delusional. The narrator notes, for instance, that after Reverend Givens's meeting with Matt, he "read over the definition [of the word *anthropology*] twice without understanding it, and then cutting off a large chew of tobacco from his plug . . . leaned back in his swivel chair to rest after the unaccustomed mental exertion" (49); on the other end of the political spectrum, we have the reported "excite[ment]" of the National Social Equality League when they learn of lynchings. Although

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the final section of the novel reinstates those hierarchies, it almost never treats this return with its former belittling tone. That earlier demeanor crops up once, when Schuyler notes the supposed gullibility of the public response to a study claiming that pale-skinned people are “mentally inferior”: “Professor Moutthe’s findings were considered authoritative,” Schuyler chides, “because he had spent three entire weeks of hard work assembling his data” (178). Aside from this case, the novel’s concluding section straightforwardly recites Americans’ sudden return to race. While the narrator’s caustic tone implies that the book’s characters are both intellectually inadequate and blind to the lapses in their own thinking, the forfeiture of this tone raises the question of just what has changed. The answer is that the novel has turned race into a compulsive way of knowing rather than a form of ignorance. If accuracy is not the relevant standard, then inaccuracies do not matter much either, and it makes little sense for the narrator to criticize characters for them.

While Du Bois sees the notion of cognitive fictions as a point of flexibility in racial politics, Schuyler’s emphasis on evolution as a source of “stuckness”—we are stuck seeing the world in falsely racial terms—reminds us that this altered understanding of biology can also lead to an opposing conclusion. It thus offers a lesson for approaching the role of cognitive fictions in evolutionary psychology today. While Du Bois’s rhetorical slip from capacity to content had a congealing potential, Schuyler seems unable to see evolutionary psychology as anything but congealed from the outset. His work thus allows us to recognize that biology of the mind can cut two ways: it can demand that we rethink the very term *biology* or it can absorb the mind into the fixities presumed of the body. That risk is precisely the one at stake in contemporary debates over the use of evolution to understand complex human behavior.

Yet while Schuyler’s deployment of cognitive fictions offers a highly pessimistic view of racial politics, race is not the only thing that is continually reinvented in *Black No More*, and this fact points to a strange silver lining that Schuyler seems enamored with in the novel. For the novel also reinvents its protagonist, as his name change indicates. Max Disher’s subjection to the Black-No-More treatment is only the first and least significant step in his reinvention. As the white Matt Fisher, he insinuates himself into the Knights of Nordica on the strength of a bluff and then singlehandedly revives the organization in the wake of its Black-No-More-induced decline, growing its membership and its bank accounts for his own profit, manipulating poverty-stricken workers and

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wealthy foreign financiers alike, all as he seduces the organization's erstwhile leader's daughter, who happened to have rejected him when he was black. Matt makes sure to have the contents of the organization's newly large bank accounts ready to dash off with when Snobbcraft's genealogical project puts a final end to his enterprise. And he is the last figure that we see in *Black No More*, grinning happily on a vacation with his family that seems to have lasted all of the last four years, his skin newly darkened to match that of his son. Matt's chameleon-like self-invention and business ventures together make him the quintessential American entrepreneur²⁸ and offer a counterpoint to the otherwise psychologically stuck populace in Schuyler's US.

In an interview with Ishmael Reed and Steve Cannon late in his life, Schuyler insisted that it would be a mistake to read Matt's leadership of a white supremacist organization as an example of minority self-hatred (141–42). The notion of cognitive fictions gives us a more sensitive way to take account of that plot twist. Matt's quick transition to leading the Knights of Nordica continues to mock any essentialist biology of race, but it also undermines our cultural expectations: we would expect that an African American man who has known only the racially hierarchical US of the early twentieth century would not be comfortable participating in the material practices of white supremacy. The fact that Matt slides smoothly into those practices simply because it seems profitable gives him an aura of imperviousness to his cultural training. He is an expert observer of the cultural landscape around him without being fully interpellated by it. This final rejection of both traditionally conceived biology and culture seems to suggest a possible value for Schuyler in a newly conceived evolutionary psychology: it may leave most people hopelessly subject to cognitive fictions, but for the evolutionary avant-garde who have escaped those fictions, it means that neither biological nor cultural history fully constrain them. Matt indeed seems immune to the cognitive fictions of race, and his entrepreneurial acumen is the mark of it. Not vesting culture with complete explanatory power seems to help Schuyler create such a figure, and the fact that he comes to seem like a stand-in for Schuyler himself suggests he is a figure Schuyler is quite taken with.

This reading finally allows us to reconsider the idea that Schuyler made a sharp shift from the leftist politics of works like *Black No More* when he became vehemently conservative in the mid-twentieth century. To be sure, *Black No More* portrays US business practices as mildly crimi-

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nal, portrays unionization as the only rational response, and paints opposition to leftist labor organizers with the same brush used to paint Southern white racism more broadly. These portrayals do look very different from Schuyler's sharp rejection of all forms of "collectivism" in his autobiography, along with his eventual political support of Richard Nixon. But an understanding of his disdain for the notion of cognitive fictions rewrites the relationship between these two points in his career. If *Black No More* represents a socialist spark that would burn out across Schuyler's career, it also shows that his evolutionarily influenced pessimism about human psychological nature was already drawing him to the captivating figure of the entrepreneur who would outlast it.

Evolution, cognition, and biology

In "Autobiographies of the Ex-White Men," Walter Benn Michaels re-vised and updated the argument of *Our America* to clarify "why race is not a social construction"—or more precisely, why it makes no sense to try to maintain race once one has conceded that it cannot be a coherent biological category. Michaels's answer is basically historical: he argues that "the situation"—that is, the historical situation—of ascribing racial identity is identical to the situation of imagining a demonized biological "essence" (243), and that it is therefore just not possible to use the term *race* to mean anything else—including a socially constructed cultural identity. Rather than enter into the highly fraught debate about whether contemporary appeals to race can avoid the essences Michaels writes against, this essay has sought to show that a literary history informed by evolutionary thought challenges the very terms in which this question gets asked. W. E. B. Du Bois and George Schuyler, inspired by different attitudes toward evolutionary thought and moving in different political directions, both experimented in the early twentieth century with the idea that race could be an action rather than an essence—specifically, a cognitive action—without being any less inevitable for that. While much of the argument over Michaels's position labors to show that race is not just a "mistake" but a "compelling reality" (236), I have argued that these two writers imagined that race could be viewed as a compelling mistake.

That Du Bois and Schuyler produce their alternative understanding with evolutionary theory in mind, rather than engage specifically with particular scientific theories of racial identity, points to the need to

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approach literature as an incubator of and not just a way of responding to scientific ideas. In this case, Du Bois's and Schuyler's early twentieth-century racial politics supply some of the conceptual tools that twenty-first-century evolutionary psychologists have ironically presented as a new way to analyze race. As I have argued, the fact that both writers were interested in using evolution to split a difference between biology and psychology makes their ideas seem highly anticipatory of the contemporary cultural interest in evolutionary psychology. For instance, Nancy Bentley points out that Steven Pinker, in a discussion of evolutionary psychology, describes the affective bonds of biological kinship as both cognitive and fictive because these bonds depend on people's beliefs about their relationships to each other rather than on actual genetic relationships: adopted children, for example, form filial attachments to the parents who happen to raise them (Bentley 275; Pinker, *How the Mind Works* 436). Du Bois's and Schuyler's anticipation of the present, however, also alerts us to potential problems with this model. These two writers sought to create a level where they could challenge and maintain traditional notions of racial identity at one and the same time. For Du Bois, I have argued, this approach maintained what he saw as valuable in race without requiring racial hierarchies. For Schuyler, it fit racial difference into a broader political pessimism that did not necessarily forsake the possibility of transcendent figures.²⁹ In both cases, however, the result was to construct an evolutionary approach to human psychology as a kind of backstop against increasingly incoherent notions of embodied racial identity. That is, while both writers embraced the mind as an embodied site, the use of cognitive fictions as a model for describing that mind turned it into a kind of holding pen for categorizations associated with very traditionally conceived bodies. In our own moment, we can run this same risk by becoming overly enamored with the idea that the mind is embodied—an inevitable conclusion, but one that we often treat as if it answered the question of whether human experience is biological, rather than as an opportunity to expand the ways in which we can ask how it is so.

Ultimately, Du Bois and Schuyler show us that at least some early twentieth-century writers did not find in evolutionary theory just a new vocabulary in which to restate old racial claims.³⁰ Neither, though, did they find in it a set of ideas that compelled them to devise a particular set of new claims. At their broadest, Du Bois's and Schuyler's evolution-

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ary experiments took the idea that race could be real even though it might be a fiction and made it into the idea that it could be real precisely because it was a fiction.³¹ Such a notion fundamentally reworks relationships among congealed terms—including *necessity*, *contingency*, *biology*, and *culture*—in which both evolutionary theory and racial politics continue to be debated today. It is thus necessary to come to terms with its role in twentieth-century US culture more broadly.

Notes

1. For instance, the same year that Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer went on a national media tour for a book that they described as an evolutionary psychology of sexual assault, David Foster Wallace's *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* developed its own fictional—and highly ironic—evolutionary psychology of what are often misleadingly called rape fantasies. Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love*, in both its novel and movie forms, is another example that draws deeply on the idea of evolutionary psychology but invents its own hypotheses.
2. For recent examples of criticisms, see David J. Buller, Jerry A. Coyne, and Susan Oyama. These writers have replaced an earlier generation of critics that most famously included Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin. Evolutionary psychologists have by and large claimed to find both generations' critiques unconvincing. Leda Cosmides and John Tooby maintain the Center for Evolutionary Psychology's website.
3. For a discussion of the displacement of comparative anatomy in studies of race, see William Stanton; for a discussion of the significance of cultural anthropology in studies of race, see George Hutchinson; and for a discussion of evolutionary theory and race, see Nancy Leys Stepan.
4. Although Michaels places Omi and Winant's work in opposition to his own argument, and although Omi and Winant accede to this opposition, in my view the opposition is false and obfuscating. Anthony Appiah notes in "The Conservation of 'Race'" that it is possible to hold that race is an illusion without holding that the racial organization of society is an illusion. It is even possible for that organization to be both a mistake and a social construction. As Michaels notes, the "belief" in biological notions of race, "mistaken though it may be, has obviously had . . . significant consequences"—namely, that we "live in a world that is still organized along racial lines" ("Autobiographies" 236); contra Michaels, it seems plausible to call this organization a "social construction." Likewise, even if Omi and Winant are right to say that race is not a "mere illusion" (68), it does not follow that racial reality does not depend on a

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(historical) mistake. To the extent that the participants in the debate wish to sort it out rather than persist in it, the recognition of these facts would be useful.

5. Popular discussions of evolutionary biology often conflate biology with genetics, speaking of genes “for” all sorts of things: blue eyes, breast cancer, same-sex desire. Some scientists resist such a view, and a debate rages over the potentially misleading nature of the “gene for X” formula. In general, this phrase misleads by suggesting that some elements of organisms are genetically controlled and some are not, when in fact all elements of organisms depend in some ways on genes and in some ways on many other things (for example fetal environment). For a discussion of why many scientists resist this conflation, see Susan Oyama’s *The Ontogeny of Information*, a founding text of developmental systems theory.

6. I owe this way of putting the point to Joel Burges.

7. Appiah does not argue, of course, that Du Bois was making an explicitly genetic argument. Rather, he sees in Du Bois’s logic a notion that we have come to call genetic. That fact becomes clear in Appiah’s reliance on the findings of late twentieth-century population genetics to debunk what he sees as the contemporary repetition of Du Bois’s logical error.

8. Gillian Beer reads Darwin’s decision to make the analogy between artificial and natural selection as his way of taming the theory of natural selection, of making it more palatable to his audience of skeptics.

9. Shamoan Zamir points out that the “generally” and “always” make biology a superfluous condition, and history a necessary condition, of racial identity. While I find that observation convincing, I am not certain that it evades the critique Appiah advances of the potentially implicit return to biology in Du Bois’s essay.

10. Beer discusses Darwin’s struggle to talk about natural selection without personifying it as an agency-bearing force. At least some readers of Darwin, however, see the view of natural selection as a creative force as one of his most significant contributions. Elizabeth Grosz summarizes this “positive” version of natural selection thus:

the pressures of population growth not only weed out the less adapted, those less able to subsist; they also impose an impetus on those who survive to produce increasing resourcefulness, to stimulate colonization, economic initiative, and the exploitation of new markets and new resources. (34)

She adds that natural selection “provides a more positive productivity when it

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functions as the source of pressure on, or as an incitement to, those individuals and species that survive to even greater proliferation and divergence" (47). My own view is that the oxymoronic quality of the term *natural selection* makes it highly misleading in a way that contributes to errors of reasoning in evolutionary analysis, and we would do well to think of a better phrase. In any case, the point that Du Bois sees evolution as an inventive process holds.

11. See Dickson D. Bruce Jr. and David Levering Lewis on Du Bois's immersion in late nineteenth-century social science's biological commitments.

12. The term *evolutionary psychology* was largely retired from use by the mid-twentieth century, eventually to re-emerge as a subfield of what E. O. Wilson termed sociobiology in his book of the same name. In 1890 William James posed the question of whether "evolutionary psychology demands a mind-dust" (146), and in 1909 G. Stanley Hall celebrated fifty years of "evolution and psychology" (251). Bert Bender discusses late nineteenth-century literary engagement with the principles that became evolutionary psychology in *The Descent of Love* and *Evolution and "the Sex Problem."*

13. See Ruth Garrett Millikan and Robert Cummins for different takes on how to do functional analysis. Nonetheless, both agree on this point.

14. It is certainly possible to develop a concept of cognitive fictions outside the context of evolutionary theory. However, the argument of this essay is that historically, this concept happens to have developed out of an adaptive functionalism that depends fully on Darwinian evolution.

15. See Daniel C. Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* and Robert L. Trivers's "The Elements of a Scientific Theory of Self-Deception."

16. Sundquist draws out that meaning of the terms, seeing them as part of the concept of "volksgeist" with which (he notes) Du Bois would have been familiar.

17. See Gaertner and Dovidio for an overview of the potential effects of racial schema, and see Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides for an argument against the biological evolution of such schema.

18. Cosmides offers an example of this language by proponents and Buller and Hardcastle an example by critics.

19. See for example Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides.

20. Any introductory textbook of evolutionary psychology makes this point; see for example Barrett, Dunbar, and Lycett.

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21. Read from an evolutionary perspective, this pessimism in *Black Empire* challenges the judgment that Schuyler made a sharp shift in the way that he talked about racial identity as his career progressed—a shift Henry Louis Gates traces in “A Fragmented Man.”

22. In this regard the novel offers a fantastical version of what Adrian Piper imagines in “Passing for White, Passing for Black.”

23. Outside of his fiction, Schuyler engaged in sincere efforts to challenge the racial sentiments of the white Americans Helen comes to stand for in this scene. His autobiography, *Black and Conservative*, discusses his faith in “re-education” as an antidote to American racism (258) and outlines his “perhaps quixotic” 1943 participation in a campaign called the “Association for Tolerance in America,” which aimed “to recondition the white masses by scientific propaganda” (259). According to Schuyler, “The error in our past procedure has been our disposition to labor with the enlightened five per cent to the exclusion of the unenlightened 95 per cent” (259). Jeffrey B. Ferguson, in his biography of Schuyler, also discusses Schuyler’s attempt to found the Young Negroes’ Cooperative League (YNCL), which he describes as part of a “romantic and ambitious vision” (121). These few examples suggest that the saccharine elements of this hospital scene are as much a part of Schuyler’s vision as is the novel’s later emphatic departure from it.

24. This diagnosis dates at least as far back as John M. Reilly’s 1978 obituary of Schuyler. Reilly observes that Schuyler’s satire is an “anti-utopia,” a genre that has “faith in predictable behavior,” “certain . . . that human beings possess a core of strivings—love or envy, truth or dissemblance—that must always frustrate the conditioning utopians prescribe” (107). For Schuyler, Reilly argued, such predictable behavior includes the idea that “everyone is a fool about color” (108).

25. It’s useful to recall the argument of Frank J. Sulloway that the Freudian psychoanalysis from which Schuyler’s notion of a sex drive and neurosis are derived stems in its turn from applying evolutionary theory to human sexuality.

26. This point plays on a convention of racial narratives in the US of using cosmological or superstitious signs as a way to think about racial signifiers. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, Jim tutors Huck in how to interpret signs like young birds flying.

27. This suggestion rewrites the pseudoscientific notion that different races experienced aversions to each other in accordance with supposedly different physical characteristics. In keeping with this idea, Darwin hypothesized that different races would have evolved specific standards of beauty. Schuyler’s de-

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parture on this point marks the way in which he takes evolution for granted in order to generate his own account of racial identity, rather than accepting specific evolutionary theories of race.

28. I owe this point to an audience member at the 2008 Modernist Studies Association panel "The Incredible Lightness of Difference."

29. Schuyler's manipulations of race in *Black No More* look ahead to the closing lines of his autobiography, published decades later: "There will be no color war here if we will and work not to have one, although some kind of color line there may always be, as there is elsewhere in the world" (352).

30. Nancy Leys Stepan shows that Darwinian evolution temporalized pre-existing racial stereotypes.

31. George Hutchinson makes the former point in his introduction to *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (221).

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Survival of the Queerly Fit:

Darwin, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop

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Darwin taught us that animals (like literary texts) are cultural entities with long histories. In order to test and explain his theory of artificial selection, he chose, “after deliberation,” to breed pigeons:

I have kept every breed which I could purchase or obtain, . . .
[and] associated with several eminent fanciers and have been
admitted to join two of the London Pigeon Clubs. The diversity
of the breeds is somewhat astonishing. (*Annotated* 20).

Between 1855 and 1858 he joined several exclusive pigeon clubs, built a pigeon house behind his garden, and at one point sported nearly ninety birds. He shared the fancier’s obsession with scrutinizing these creatures’ equipage, carriage, and feathers as he studied the mechanisms of their propagation. In his research he discovered that the pigeon had an illustrious career as a domesticated creature, with its “earliest known record” in “the fifth Egyptian dynasty, about 3000 B.C.” (27). To conclude that domesticated varieties can be traced to the Rock Pigeon, he surveyed the vast scene (“variation has been extraordinarily great”) in long paragraphs packed with interesting detail: “Pigeons were much valued by Akber Khan in India, about the year 1600; never less than 20,000 pigeons were taken with the court” (28). The pigeon had evolved over distinct periods, mutating in response to human breeding. Once a messenger of “valentines and messages / of state” (Moore, *A-Quiver* 103), the pigeon had become a one-way postal worker, fulfilling both human and evolutionary missions.

The pigeon is an important motif in this essay as I trace Darwin’s impact on Marianne Moore, whose influence on Elizabeth Bishop was

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perhaps equal to Darwin's own, not so much as a figure in itself as a carrier of Darwin's idea of artificial selection. My larger argument is that Moore and Bishop, modern queer women poets, would have found Darwin's theories far more amenable to their sense of sexual and aesthetic deviation than those offered by Freud, who shaped much of how writers at the turn of the century and well into the twentieth century conceived of sexuality and identity. I use *queer* in a broad rather than specific sense. Bishop lived a lesbian life, though she was not "out." Moore is difficult to pin down, but as Linda Leavell argues,

Although [Moore] may never have had a sexually intimate relationship, she did participate in what [Adrienne] Rich has defined broadly as a "lesbian continuum" that can include many forms of "primary intensity between and among women." (222)

I argue that Darwin's vivid presentation of slow transitions over extended geological time, peculiar forms, gradual adaptations, and transitional states held out a less binary model than either sexology's invert or Freud's female homosexual. In this sense, Darwin offered these poets a way of reading desire beyond Freud's "masculine woman" who refuses to identify with the normative mother's domesticated and passive role. While the word *queer* in our contemporary currency does not enter Darwin's writings, he focused on deviations that prove the rule: artificial selection and the selecting hand could go too far and breed monstrosity. Nevertheless, his array of possible embodiments encouraged these poets as modern naturalists to bypass Freud's human-centered oedipal structure and the sexual drama it dictates. Both Moore and Bishop read Darwin widely. He gave them an unsentimental, even depersonalized vision of nature, but one filled with attractive anomalies and "originals."

Further, Moore and Bishop identified with his monumental acuity for collecting details and his doubts about readiness for publication. Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 partly because he feared a preemptive publication by Alfred Russel Wallace, who had, during his own journey in the Malay Archipelago, discovered natural selection, but without the detailed and elaborate evidence Darwin had long been compiling. Thus he called his 1859 version an abstract and continued to expand and revise it. Both Moore and Bishop likewise habitually revised their writing and hesitated to publish prematurely. They saw the creative process much in the way he conceived of natural selection, occurring over long

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stretches, evolving, with geologic layers, vestiges, and transitional stages. Attracted, therefore, both to Darwin's theories and his methods, they must have felt compelled to ponder difficult origins, aesthetic development, and cultural sexual imperatives.

Even so, Darwin had his blind spots. Evolutionary biologist Patricia Gowaty tellingly entitled a recent talk: "A Theoretical Explanation for the Continuance of Males for Seizing and Restraining Females That Darwin Did Not Attempt to Explain and Did Not Want to Discuss." Both Moore and Bishop were well aware of this recurrent "Seizing and Restraining": for instance, Moore asserts in her poem "Marriage" "that men have power / and sometimes one is meant to feel it" (*Complete Poems* 67), and Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502," portrays a stark scenario of sexual and national conquest:

The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes
are on the smaller, female one, back-to,
her wicked tail straight up and over,
red as red-hot wire. (*Complete Poems* 79)

Indeed, Darwin catalyzes for these two poets a possible lineage for the queerly fit that disturbs the dominance (and resistance) present in a conventional heterosexual mating ritual. However, in charting a lineage between Darwin and my two poets, I focus more on Darwin's understated representation of nonreproductive sexuality and of mothering and a similar understatement and anxiety in both Moore and Bishop.

Neither Moore nor Bishop married or bore children; both contemplated reproduction with anxiety, amusement, and sometimes horror. Bishop acknowledged that not having children had been one of her regrets. Most of her life, Moore lived with her mother, who was the "significant other" in her life. For Moore, marriage was an "institution" or "enterprise" "requiring all one's criminal ingenuity / to avoid!" (*Complete Poems* 62). Moore's father was considered unstable, and Marianne never met him. Bishop lost both her father and mother at an early age; her mother, grief-struck at her husband's death, was institutionalized in a sanitarium in Halifax, where she remained until she died (Bishop never visited). Except when she lived with Lota de Soares in Brazil in the 1950s as a "commuter queer," in Henry Abelove's phrase (75), Bishop was a closeted lesbian.

Moore is frequently thought of as a kind of literary mother of Bishop,

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encouraging her and helping to place her poems; strangely, they met in 1934, the year Bishop's own mother died, which might help explain the younger poet's initial cleaving to Moore's esteem. One of Bishop's key recollections of Moore, however, is being asked to "divert" the guards at a circus so that "if we were lucky, [they] wouldn't observe [Moore] at the end of the line where the [elephant] babies were, and she could take out her scissors and snip a few hairs from a baby's head" to replace missing ones from a favored clasp bracelet given to her by her brother ("Efforts of Affection" 125). Moore thus modeled fetishism, familial bonding, and deviancy. Bishop, appointed as guard, was complicit in this scene of "artificial selection," where Moore performed a kind of grooming, harvesting the infant elephant hairs for an artifact.

Moore read widely and shared with Darwin the collector's habit, gathering quotations from diverse sources—fashion magazines, travel guides, manuals, literary texts, and scientific treatises, including those by Lamarck, Cuvier, Humboldt, and Darwin. If we think of Moore's pack rat or magpie sensibility from a slightly different angle, she handles phrases as if they were specimens in an extended natural history: part of her queer mothering resides in breeding unusual, diverse linguistic permutations and hybrids. Darwin reminds us that varieties are difficult to trace: "in fact, a breed, like a dialect of a language, can hardly be said to have had a definite origin" (*Annotated* 40). More visibly, Moore provided Bishop a menagerie of queer animals that her poems preserve, while they (the animals and the poems) resist conventional reproduction. The impact of Darwin on both writers is multifaceted, but I concentrate on a rather muted dynamic: mothering is rather brazenly absent in Darwin. Eliding maternity is, of course, in line with his de-emphasis of humans in nature, yet he manages to foreground gentlemen scientists and fanciers throughout *Origin*.

In a book dedicated largely to concepts of breeding, Darwin underplays the maternal, referring in 1859 only to *male* mammary glands occurring as "[r]udimentary organs" that

sometimes retain their potentiality, and are merely not developed: this seems to be the case with the mammae of male mammals, for many instances are on record of these organs having become well developed in full-grown males, and having secreted milk. (*Annotated* 451)

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In contrast to *mammae*, the eye obtains considerable notice; Darwin criticizes the construal of the telescope as analogous to the eye, for the operations of vision are far more complex than this great invention (*Annotated* 188–89).

The specifically maternal emerges only a few times in the 1859 edition of *Origin*. In one instance he depicts the

instinctive hatred of the queen bee, which urges her instantly to destroy the young queens her daughters as soon as born, or to perish herself in the combat: for undoubtedly this is for the good of the community; and maternal love or maternal hatred, though the latter fortunately is most rare, [are part of an] inexorable principle of natural selection. (*Annotated* 202–03)

In another instance he describes the cuckoo, who lays her eggs “at intervals of two or three days.” “If she were to make her own nest and sit on her own eggs, those first laid would have to be left for some time unincubated,” but the American cuckoo occasionally solves this problem by laying “her egg in another bird’s nest.”

If the old bird profited by this occasional habit, or if the young were made more vigorous by advantage of having been taken of the *mistaken maternal instinct* of another bird, than by their own mother’s care, encumbered as she can hardly fail to be by having eggs and young of different ages at the same time; then the old birds or the fostered young would gain an advantage. And analogy would lead me to believe, that the young thus reared would be apt to follow by inheritance the occasional and *aberrant habit* of their mother, and in their turn would be apt to lay their eggs in other birds’ nests. (217; my italics)

The cuckoo case supports Darwin’s view of adaptive behaviors, yet his language points to more qualitative findings: while he sympathizes with the “aberrant” mother and her “occasional” habit, he casts the adoptive mother with her “mistaken maternal instinct” in a more positive light. Further, the suspiciously regarded natural mother is implicitly differentiated from the male pigeon breeders (akin to foster mothers) with whom Darwin consorted. I am aware that the cuckoo parent and the breeder resist comparison, though Darwin invites one by crafting a continuum

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inhabited by animals and humans and by using empathic, often personifying language in describing the natural world.

By the time of the 1872 sixth edition of *Origin* (itself an evolving species), Darwin's "most significant structural change," as James Costa notes, was an additional chapter titled "Miscellaneous Objections to the Theory of Natural Selection," which attempted to answer contemporary queries (*Annoted* vii). It uniquely and vexingly introduces the breast and nipple, and is pivotal in situating Darwin with Moore's and Bishop's own queer mothering. Indeed, it highlights the trouble that the mammary glands cause him: he can't quite confirm their evolutionary purpose. He writes:

mammals are descended from a marsupial form; and if so, the mammary glands will have been at first developed within the marsupial sack. In the case of the fish (*Hippocampus*) the eggs are hatched, and the young are reared for a time, within a sack of this nature. [They are] nourished by a secretion from the cutaneous glands of the sack, [probably] the homologues of the mammary glands. (*Origin* 1872, 224)

He theorizes, with some difficulty, that with "the principle of specialization," the mammary glands

would then have formed a breast, but at first without a nipple, as we see in the *Ornithorhynchus*, at the base of the mammalian series. Through what agency the glands over a certain space became more highly specialised than the others, *I will not pretend to decide*, whether in part through compensation of growth, the effects of use, or of natural selection.

The development of the mammary glands *would have been of no service*, and could not have been affected through natural selection, unless the young at the same time were able to partake of the secretion. *There is no greater difficulty in understanding* how young mammals have instinctively learned to suck the breast, than in understanding how unhatched chickens have learned to break the egg-shell by tapping against it with their specially adapted beaks; or how a few hours after leaving the shell they have learned to pick up grains of food. (224–25; my italics)

Darwin "will not pretend to decide" what motivated a transition from the functional sack (concealed from view) to the externalized breast with

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nipple. In this same new chapter he zooms in on the “young kangaroo said not to suck, only to cling to the nipple of its mother, who has the power of injecting milk into the mouth of her helpless, half-formed offspring” who if it did not possess, by “special provision,” an elongated larynx, would have “choked by the intrusion of the milk” (225). He foregrounds the mother’s power and her offspring’s helplessness with the danger of choking from the nipple’s intrusive sustenance. While Darwin frequently wrote of the stirring interdependency at work in nature, still a kind of anxiety of dependency and pathos here hovers over the “helpless” young. Darwin’s own mother died when he was eight, so the whole topic of nurturance and motherhood might well have moved him too deeply. In “An Autobiographical Fragment” (1838), he records that his younger sister Caroline “remember[s] all particular[s] & events of each day, whilst I scarcely recollect anything, except being sent for—” When his mother died, “I recollect my mother’s gown & scarcely anything of her appearance. Except one or two walks with her I have no distinct remembrance of any conversations” (439). Whatever the source of Darwin’s forgetfulness, the mother and her nurturing apparatus are either perturbing or absent in *Origin*.

If both poets accede to Darwin’s theories of selection, need they also diminish mothering? For both Moore and Bishop, as I have suggested, the maternal was supercharged: for Moore, her mother was central, almost at times too omnipresent; for Bishop, her mother gained similar significance through stark absence, knowledge hard-won and “drawn from the cold hard mouth / of the world, derived from the rocky breasts” (*Complete Poems* 66). Must one renounce the breast entirely, or choke on its milk, so to speak? Such a question might well compel those who seek to understand the dynamics of survival and helplessness. In a nineteenth-century context, Darwin would have been familiar with the use of wet nurses and with the growing understanding that breast milk, and especially the colostrum, was healthful for infant development (Yalom 226). Yet for Darwin, the breast appears to be neither clearly adaptive nor erotic.¹

In “Vaguely Love Poem,” an unpublished poem overt in its lesbian eroticism, Bishop represents a hallucinatory antidote for Darwin’s discomfort with the nipple’s appearance; she writes, with crystallography in mind:

Rose, trying, working, to show itself,
forming, folding over,

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unimaginable connections, unseen, shining edges. Rose-rock,
unformed, flesh beginning, crystal by crystal,
clear pink breasts and darker, crystalline nipples. (Papers)

It is as though Bishop sees evolution in process as a form of visual eroticism. For Darwin, of course, it was necessary not to invoke the angelic version of Victorian motherhood, and female sexual desire was certainly not his subject. Yet *Origin* makes ample room for the male breeder or fancier as surrogate, who could, like a mother, hear the reflexive and responsive coo of its baby. In Bishop's "Crusoe in England," to be addressed in the final portion of this essay, Daniel Defoe's survivor is such a fancier, grafted with Darwin as obsessive taxonomist endlessly compelled to name fauna and flora on multitudinous bodies of land. Without the cooing pigeons but shrieking goats instead, Bishop's Crusoe is also a would-be male mother, acting out homoerotic and maternal desires.

With this backdrop in mind, Darwin provides Moore and her poetic offspring a means of conceiving of the queerly fit, those who thrive in their variation without physical propagation. Moore and Bishop were themselves ambivalent about mothers and mothering, but by studying Darwin and each other, they recreated a more queerly drawn idea of domestication and reproduction. Darwin, as we shall see, is most eloquent about pigeons, in part because the men who bred them enacted what I consider a form of queer male mothering. Darwin's membership in these clubs helped him highlight "the selecting hand, invisible in nature" but "manifested in man's actions as a breeder" (Secord 165). Breeding pigeons further solidified several elements of his overarching theory in *Origin*: first, pigeons are unique in their almost endless variation, and disprove the notion that each variety was engendered as immutable; second, their long history of domestication and malleability testify to artificial selection; and finally, they are the perfect specimens for the male breeder, who joins with a community of gentlemen in unconscious selection, what Darwin considers the invisible alterations engendered over long periods of time through unwitting communal choices. By stepping aside from mammary glands and their secretions, the fanciers could foster, catalog, display, trade, and share a pipe. Apparently Darwin wrote to his son about meeting a certain Bernard Brent, who specifically bred house Tumblers:

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I think I shall belong to the Columbarian society where, I fancy, I shall meet a strange set of odd men. —Mr Brent was a very queer little fish but I suppose Mamma told you about him; after dinner he handed me a clay pipe, saying “here is your pipe” as if it was a matter of course that I smoke. Another odd little man (N.B. all Pigeon Fanciers are little men, I began to think.)

(*Annotated* 214))

Men apparently had frissons at pigeon clubs, not just at coffee houses! In spite of his semimocking tone, Darwin was drawn to these circles of “queer little fish.” The fancier, in fact, is a similar figure to that of the late Victorian male dandy, or at least of a man with an unstable sexual identity, participating in scenarios of domestication associated with mothering and the rearing of young.

In figure 2 *Punch* likens the gentlemen breeders to the birds pictured in figure 1 (both on the next page). I can’t help noting the effeminate roundedness of the gentlemen and the pigeons and the inflated “bust” of the gentleman in figure 2 modeled on the Pouter pigeon in figure 1. These images contextualize Darwin’s obsession with pigeon breeding as part of the century’s disputations over sex roles, which, as we shall see, play out in the poetic imagination.

§

I now turn to a group of poems that link Darwin to Moore and Bishop, and the poets to each other, to illustrate their queer lineage. Moore’s 1935 “Pigeons” is “humbly dedicated to / the Gentlemen of the / Feather Club” (*A-Quiver* 105). Moore separates “gentlemen” and “feather” with a line break, increasing the fey aspect of these connoisseurs, yet she notes that the “dainty breed” she describes is “developed by” the gentlemen. “Bird-Witted,” written the following year, deliberates on a rather grotesque outcome of the maternal instinct sans gentlemen. Bishop’s “The Man-Moth,” published in 1936, responds to Moore (with both “Man” and the incomplete “Moth[er]” in its title), delineating a hybrid who adapts and creates, though haunted by the maternal. Several other early Paris poems prefigure later ones that are anxious about propagation and queerness, namely “Pink Dog” and “Crusoe in England,” both published in the 1970s.

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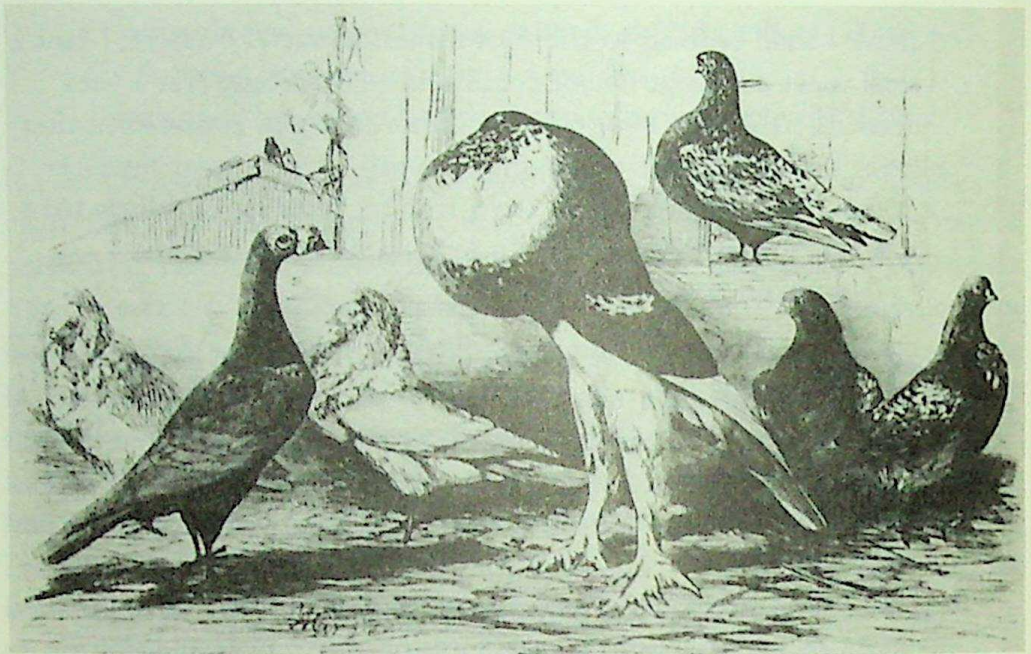


Figure 1. Pigeons. *Illustrated London News* 18:48 (1851). (Secord 164)

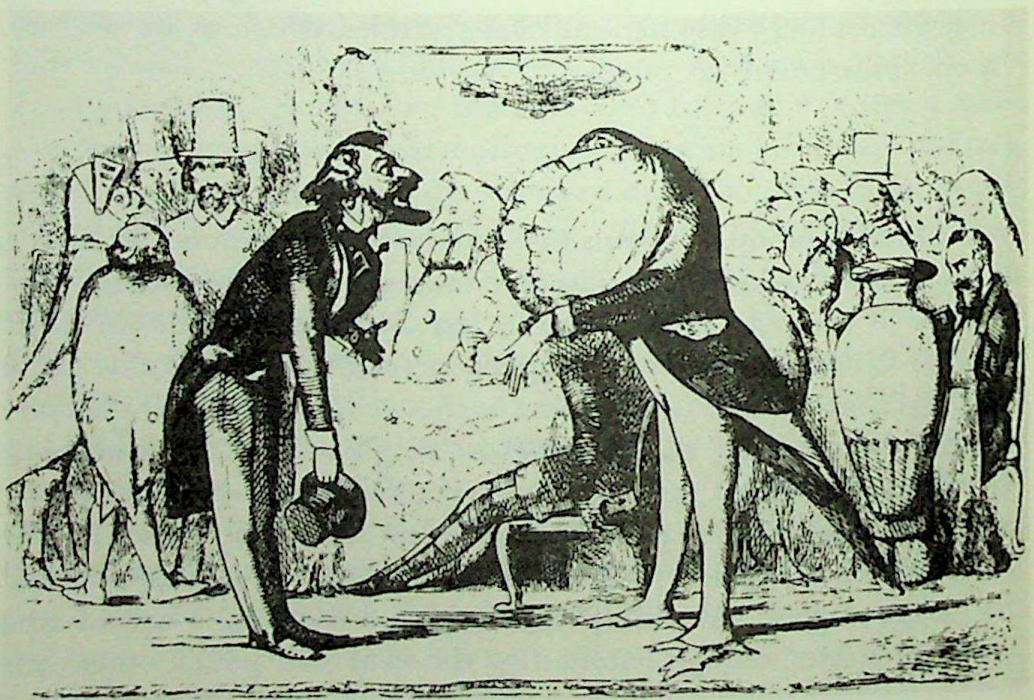


Figure 2. Pigeons. *Punch* 20:56 (1851). (Secord 164)

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In a letter to Bryher, Moore reprimands the generous young patron for publishing *Poems* without her knowledge, and borrows from Darwin a self-description: “in *Variations of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, Darwin speaks of a variety of pigeon that is born naked without any down whatever. I feel like a Darwinian gosling” (*Selected Letters* 164). Not using the word *gosling*, Darwin writes of a “curious and inexplicable case of correlating, namely, that young pigeons of all breeds which when mature become white, yellow, silver (i.e. extremely pale blue), or dun coloured, are born almost naked,” whereas pigeons of “other colours are born well clothed with down” (*Variation* 157). For Moore, it is an exceptionally important distinction: to be born with or without down. As I have no space here to explore the emotional, erotically tinged relationship between Moore and the masculine Bryher (Havelock Ellis told Bryher she was a “girl only by accident”² [Bryher to H.D. 20 March 1919. Bryher Papers]), suffice it to say that Bryher’s publication of Moore belonged to what I consider a courtship. Moore here derives her very identity from a creature delineated by Darwin, whom she read with much care. She also took the nickname Pterodactyl from Bryher to suggest that she saw herself linked to a Cretaceous flying reptile rather than to modern incarnations of female identity. Bryher urged Moore, from the moment they met, to publish a whole volume; once Bryher took the initiative, Moore felt she had been rushed, and if we take the image from her letter seriously, it would seem that she perceived Bryher’s caretaking to have gone awry. She signs this important letter “Your now naked Dactyl,” combining the gosling image with that of a poetic role and an erotic friend.

According to Heather Cass White, “Pigeons,” published in *Poetry* in 1935, was supposed to be part of yet another Bryher-sponsored production, a small deluxe edition of Moore’s poems, *Pangolin & Other Poems*, but Moore ultimately removed “Pigeons” (*A-Quiver* xix). In a letter to Bishop, Moore writes that she had “fallen into the depraved habit of writing a thing after it has begun to be printed, so feel a certain resentment toward ‘Pigeons’ which there was not time to alter in accordance with my belated abridgement” (*Selected Letters* 358). I speculate that there was still a personal undertow from the first Bryher enterprise, a need to resist letting this “gosling” out of the nest. In a sense, “Pigeons” responds to Bryher’s continued perception that Moore was overly sheltered, in need of wider scope. The poem makes the homing-pigeon with its two hatchlings a private matter; without entering into questions of sexual characteristics,

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she describes these birds as possessing a bravado yet also a discreet, airtight intimacy—much like Moore's tie with her mother and brother.

This may seem like a long trek from Darwin, with Bryher as queer copula between him and Moore, but perhaps not. Darwin devotes pages to domesticated pigeons in *Origin* as well as in other writings, such as *Variation*, and returns again and again to examples from pigeon breeds to support other related points. In his catalog of pigeon varieties he is often at his most particular and lyrical; evidently carried away with his descriptions, he exults not only in the pigeons themselves but also in the camaraderie of pigeon breeders.

Darwin, as will Moore, revels in “wonderful” distinctions and portraiture:

Compare the English carrier and the short-faced tumbler, and the wonderful difference in their beaks, entailing corresponding differences in their skulls. The carrier, more especially the male bird, is also remarkable from the wonderful development of the carunculated skin about the head; and this is accompanied by greatly elongated eyelids, very large external orifices of the nostrils, and a wide gape of mouth. (*Annotated* 21)

Like his descendant Moore, Darwin delights in names and character traits, calling out “the short-faced tumbler” with an “inherited habit of flying at a great height in a compact flock, and tumbling in the air head over heels”; “the runt”; “the barb”; “the pouter” whose “enormously developed crop, which it glories in inflating, [and] may well excite astonishment and even laughter”; there's “the Jacobin” with its “feathers so much reversed along the back of the neck that they form a hood”; “the trumpeter”; “the fantail” with “its thirty or even forty tail-feathers, instead of twelve or fourteen, the normal number in all members of the great pigeon family.”

Darwin abbreviates (one feels) his irrepressible observations in order to conclude “that all have descended from the rock-pigeon” (*Annotated* 23), which he describes as having an unmistakable appearance: “slaty-blue,” with a “white rump”; its “tail has a terminal dark bar, with the bases of outer feathers externally edged with white; the wings have two black bars, the wings chequered with black” (25). Evidently Moore herself had a longstanding interest in pigeon breeds, given that she published a series of poems (including “Conseil to a Bachelor”) under the heading “Tumblers, Pouters, & Fantails” in *Poetry* in May 1915 (*Becoming* 166.) In “Pigeons”

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Moore returns to the “rock pigeon,” “to begin / with the bluish slate” and then launches her poem, an exercise in “ramifying” for 120 lines:

Older than the ancient Greeks, than
 Solomon, the pigeon family is a
 ramifying one, a
 Banyan of banyans; to begin
 with the bluish slate,
 but with ability. (*A-Quiver* 101)

The differently indented lines are familiar in Moore, as are her unexpected stresses, such as the sudden short line ending on “ability,” which, it would seem, refers to the pigeon’s able departure from an original template. As with Darwin, the numerous breeds fascinate Moore, and their origin (more ancient “than / Solomon”) fans into a list of pigeons of the past (102), the names of pigeons highlighting human domestication, so that “Sergeant Dunn, / civilian pigeon” blurs with fanciful and geographic names recognized in scientific treatises: the Pelew, the Nicobar, the Papuan, the Samoan “tooth-billed pigeon fortunately / survives also—” (104). Moore diverges to examine the near relatives of the pigeon, the extinct Dodo, as well as the “extinct Solitaires,” “which having ‘raised / their young one do not disunite.’” Moore notoriously withholds the sources for her quotations. This fragment comes from Charles Dixon’s *Lost and Vanishing Birds* (1898). Moore’s own poem is a plea for survival. Apparently Mauritius was raided of dodos and within a year they became extinct; Dixon writes poignantly: “The poor Dodo, however, was never allowed to remain in peace for long, and the next vessel to reach the island decimated the unfortunate species. This was in 1601” (216).

The Samoan, writes Moore, is similarly “remarkable” because “related to the dodo” (*A-Quiver* 104). In this last third of the poem, Moore slips into understated pathos for the extinction of these birds, quoting from Dixon’s “traveler” who “said ‘defenceless unsuspecting / things, with a cry like the / cry of a Gosling’” (104; qtd. from Dixon 224). Clearly there is some identification with the gosling (recall her earlier letter to Bryher) as outmoded bird, and perhaps some anxiety about her own nonreproduction; then she inserts a distinctly Darwinian observation, tinged with irrevocable loss: “A new pigeon cannot compensate, but we have / it” (104).

One key to the poem’s queer reproductivity lies in the fact that

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Moore's own peculiar family bonding and aesthetic, not yet "extinct," holds fast in its melancholic refusal of compensation. At the same time, the poem creates an aesthetic drawbridge, conversing with the queer Bryher (who wanted to republish "Pigeons") as well as with Bishop, to whom Moore had begun to pass on her own wisdom about literary contraception and reproduction.

Moore's "Pigeons" as a whole is eccentric (one of a kind) and essayistic, working by association and catalog, tracing a nonchronological genealogy, praising "Her- / mes, Ariel, or Leander— / pigeons of the past," merging the literary, mythic, and real. But over the course of the first fifty lines, the idea of the mercurial "homing pigeon" is Moore's compelling figure—"exceptional messenger," this "civilian pigeon who flew eight / hundred sixty-eight miles / in four days and six hours; and destined to hatch / in France." Like the poet, the pigeon is its own wireless. Though they may travel broadly and cross many boundaries, pigeons famously follow regular migration and mating patterns. Thus she enthuses over this "mysterious animal with a magnetic / feel by which he traces back- / ward his transportation outward, / even in a fog at sea" (102). In other words, in this fanciful yet naturalist world, the pigeon can cover miles and "get back the same day. / 'Home on time without / his message.' What matter since he has / got back." The pigeon as "anonymous post-man" insists on backward movement and the strangely familiar: "Migrating always in the same / direction, bringing all letters / to the same address, see- / ing better homes" (103).³ The sameness in address, as well as "outward" difference, point to how Moore might have regarded her homebody status as part of her recursive aesthetics as well as signaling the chiding she received from Bryher for not traveling.

Further, Moore must have known, as Darwin notes, that the domesticated pigeon "can be easily mated for life" (*Annotated* 28), that it is customary for pigeons to hatch only a pair of eggs at a time, and that the "homers," as they were called, divide incubating duties between the male and female. There is an attractive dignity in this scenario for Moore, who kept close to her own nest. Central to my topic here of anxiety over propagation and continuation, the poet, like the gentleman fancier, admires the pigeon family. She refers to the pigeon as not just an "instinctive individual" or even refined "instrument" but also as a creature that aims to board and brood (not only breed):

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dove, that lifts his right foot over
 the alighting-
 board to rejoin his ungainly pin-clad dark-skinned
 brood as domestic turtle-
 doves might; two. Invariably
 two. (*A-Quiver* 103)

The perfect pair, the emphatic “two,” are “invariably” undifferentiated. (The turtle dove apparently must “stay far out of sight” because it can be “detected / by its constantly heard coo.”) One of the reasons the multifarious pigeon has so much appeal for Darwin and his fanciers, and by extension for Moore, is that there is generally little distinction between the sexes—though Darwin writes that “in certain breeds, the males and females have come to differ to a slight degree from each other” (*Annotated* 22).

This poem, aware of endangered species as well as of the possibilities in breeding, is most especially engaged in reproducing its own queer catalogues, as for instance: “one should see the Papuan / fanciest with six-sided scale which / coats the foot,” who are “hid in unimag- / inably weak lead-colored ostrich- / plumes a third of an inch long, and / needle-fine cat-whisker-fibred battleship- / gray lace” (*A-Quiver* 104). In her gender-crossing taxonomy of battleship and lace, she renders the hypervariant. She notes as well that the Samoan pigeon is “related to the dodo. / *Didus ineptus*.” The roots of names (whether what they point to survives or not) are part of Moore’s queer aesthetic of survival and recovery. In some sense, the poem is an experiment in artificial selection. After the assertion that “a new pigeon cannot compensate” for those extinct, she verbally creates such a new pigeon through exuberant description and hybrid phrases. She may mock the gentleman fancier while identifying with him.

Like Darwin’s fanciers (recall his “queer little fish” who bred tumblers), Moore makes much of the pigeon’s feathers (“seriatum down / the main and tail” [105]), reaching a crescendo in the last twenty lines, comparing the bird’s covering or gown to

a slender Cinderella deliberately
 pied, so she on each side is
 the same, an all feather piebald,
 cuckoo-marked on a titanic scale

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taking perhaps sixteen birds to
 show the whole design, as in chess,
 played with men and hors-
 es. Yes, the thus mediievally
 two-colored sea pie-patterned semi-swan-
 necked magpie-pigeon, gamecock-legged
 with long-clawed toes, and all extremes
 —head neck back tail
 and feet—coal black, the
 rest snow white, has a surpris-
 ing modernness and fanciness
 and stateliness and . . . Yes indeed;
 developed by and humbly dedicated to
 the Gentlemen of the
 Feather Club, this is a dainty breed. (105)

Moore's "piebald feathers" "on a titantic scale" recall the "chequered" (Darwin's word) design on the wings of the Rock Pigeon. She conjures up the monstrous potential for breeders who, while drawn to extreme novelty, resist the too monstrous. Playfully, Moore breaks her lines in unconventional places ("hors- / es," "surpris- / ing") to accompany her hybrid phrasings and crossed breeds ("two-colored sea pie-patterned semi-swan- / necked magpie-pigeon, gamecock-legged / with long-clawed toes, and all extremes"). In this sense she spawns her own new verbal creatures, acting out the potential for monstrous extravagance in artificial selection.

Moore shares Darwin's aesthetic of enumeration and accumulation. Yet while Darwin praises diversity, he warns against excessive modification that can breed monstrosity. On the continuum of variation, the queer person or bird would certainly be found at the extreme, among the monstrous. Thus Moore also jibes at those of the "Feather Club" in her poem's conclusion: "Yes indeed; / developed by and humbly dedicated to / the Gentlemen of the / Feather Club, this is a dainty breed." Is it the poem, the pigeons, or the gentlemen that are "dainty"?

The circumstances of her mother bird in the 1926 "Bird-Witted," written the year after "Pigeons" and reprinted in *A-Quiver* (117), would certainly not qualify as such, considering her bird's natural yet perverse attack on a domestic cat in the poem. Moore calls to account the special-

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ized circumstances of those who manage dovecotes: the fancier has no notion of need or hunger; his environments are all carefully crafted and supplied. When one considers that the breeder liked his pigeons partly because of their plasticity, their ability to propagate “in great numbers” (*Annotated* 43), it places “Bird-Witted”—a true Depression-era poem—in a fresh light: it is in fact one of the few poems Moore wrote from the mother’s point of view. From an economic as well as evolutionary standpoint, Darwin would contend that natural selection requires sterility for some (he cites the important example of worker insects, all female, who must be sterile so that the rest of the community can survive) as well as the disasters that naturally reduce populations; he was influenced in his thinking by Thomas Malthus, whose *Essay on Population* argued that the tendency to increase militated against providing sufficient sustenance.

Rather than dedicated to the “Feather Club,” this poem is centered on the struggle for survival in an unprotected setting. Moore makes the mockingbird trio’s mother a perverse hero, diving down upon a “piebald” and “creeping cat”—going to all lengths to care for her young (*A-Quiver* 117). She dutifully brings “the still living / beetle” to them, providing only “something which will partially / feed one of them.” This is more forthrightly an antireproduction poem, in that population exceeds what can be supplied to satiate hunger. Writing again to Bryher, Moore describes the inciting scene: “three grown mocking-bird fledglings—mouse gray with dark gray freckles on their chest—persecute their mother for food.” These are no cooing pigeons; they are “chirping without a pause all day, in the tone of a broken carriage-spring” (*Selected Letters* 252). In the poem, the mother is “nerved by what chills the blood” and “since nothing fills / squeaking unfed / mouths,” she “wages deadly combat, / and half kills / with bayonet beak and / cruel wings” (*A-Quiver* 117), thus both reinforcing and reversing a Darwinian expectation. Governed by instincts to feed and protect (there is no father present), this mother (written with the shadow of Darwin’s theories on it) can’t occupy a desirable position; she is besieged on all sides.

I conclude by looking briefly at Moore’s queer influence on Bishop. Published two years after “Bird-Witted,” Bishop’s “Man-Moth” (which Moore encouraged the young poet to publish in Bryher’s *Life & Letters To-Day* [*Selected Letters* 353])⁴ is titled after a newspaper misprint for the extinct mammoth (of the elephant family), adding the danger of extinction to the poem’s urban hybrid, its prototypic outsider/poet, sexually in-

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determinate, endangered but persistent. Bishop's Man-Moth (part mother) haunts "the pale subways of cement he calls his home" and "always seats himself facing the wrong way" (*Complete Poems* 14). Like the bird hatching from an egg, the Man-Moth emerges "from an opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks" and, as if inversely traveling the birth canal, climbs up buildings "fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage / to push his small head through that round clean opening." Like Moore's pigeons or mockingbirds, the Man-Moth embodies anxiety over sexual and genetic inheritance; traits appear and reappear across generations, and Bishop's creature is no exception: "he does not dare look out the window, / for the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison, / runs there beside him. He regards it as disease / he has inherited susceptibility to" (15). In other words, this Man-Moth, like Bishop vis-à-vis her own mother, fears madness, and even suicide: "he has to keep / his hands in his pockets, as others wear mufflers." Bishop offers a naturalist close-up, both precise and estranging: "Hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil / an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens / as he stares back, and closes up the eye." If we pay attention, "one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips." The tear is the only basis for generative activity, a vestige of "underground springs," excepting perhaps the Man-Moth's "photographer's cloth" (14), his shadow on the buildings more a negative than a reproduction. The sting is likened to the tear, feminizing this Man-Moth. According to Costa, the "sting of bees, wasps, and ants is thought to be a modified egg-laying structure, or ovipositor. This is why only females are sting-bearing." He notes that Aristotle mistakenly thought "stinging bees must be male, since nature would not provide weaponry to females of any species" (*Annotated* 202n2). Think of Moore's deployment of her bird's "bayonet beak"; here we have the sting.

Bishop's "Pink Dog," completed in 1979, with its depilated dog hobbling through Rio's streets just before Carnival, further supplies an ironic commentary on species survival; Bishop called the subject "ghastly" (*One Art* 629), yet her form nestles in elaborate tercets, in one stanza linking a witty yet diabolical inevitability of "rabies," "scabies," "babies" (*Complete Poems* 190). Darwin's "striving to increase" is set in dismal light, with Bishop's "poor bitch" who is a "nursing mother, by those hanging teats" (190–91). This exposure (no sack conceals these glands) expresses the poet's ambivalence about femaleness, as do "those awful hanging breasts" (161) from the *National Geographic* of "In the Waiting Room," where

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Bishop's aunt stands in for the painfully absent mother. The scavenger dog mirrors back to the curious Carnival attendee the masquerade of happy reproduction; she's "a- / n eyesore" (191) (the kind of line break Moore probably engendered). Moore's mother in "Bird-Witted" was also "persecuted" by the "high-keyed intermittent squeak / of broken carriage-springs" (*A-Quiver* 117). Thus this lineage of anxiety persists around being either maternal caretaker or dependent gosling; the fancier may control the breeding ground, but not within these urban settings where "idiots, paralytics, parasites / go bobbing in the ebbing sewage" (Bishop, *Complete Poems* 190) along with Rio's beggars.

Both Moore and Bishop shroud aberrant desire as if it belonged in the setting of "Pink Dog" and its enumerated undesirables. The pigeon, in fact, in Bishop's 1930s meditative "Paris, 7 A.M." is a vehicle, suggestive of a phantom love imagined during a winter dawn where

The short, half-tone scale of winter weathers
is a spread pigeon's wing.
Winter lives under a pigeon's wing, a dead wing with
damp feathers. (26)

The poet makes "a trip to each clock in the apartment," and to look below is to see geometric circles and squares: "All the houses / are built that way, with ornamental urns / set on the mansard roof-tops where the pigeons / take their walks." Moore suggested Bishop delete "apartment," but Bishop held strong; the word, she argued, emphasized a sense of "apartness" and a "cut-off" mode of existence so well" (*One Art* 46). She was living with Louise Crane, and apparently they had a pair of doves. She had written Moore 4 February 1936 that she was reading "Pigeons" and enclosed photographs of "the doves"; the picture shows "Mr. Dove bowing to his wife with stiff knees and his throat puffed out" (*One Art* 31). This caricature does not animate the abode of the solitary lesbians. Imagination breaks off where there could have been "childish snow-forts, built in flashier winters"; and survives: "withstanding spring as sand-forts do the tide, / their walls, their shape, could not dissolve and die, / only be overlapping in a strong chain, turned to stone, / and grayed and yellowed now like these" (*Complete Poems* 26). This "strong chain" may be a Darwinian wish for ancestral lineage or propagation, yet I believe this poem invokes the pigeon as mortuary reminder of repressed desire: the pigeon "is a dead one, or the sky from which a dead one fell. / The urns have caught his ashes or his feathers."

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This poem reverberates with other grey-toned Paris poems of the period. "Roosters" has the evolutionary screaming "from raw throats" (36) and the "uncontrolled, traditional cries," the birds with "the many wives / who lead hens' lives" (35), while contrapuntally, the poem "Love Lies Sleeping" (akin to "Paris, 7 A.M."), set in "Earliest morning, switching all the tracks" (16), situates the deviant lover as possibly dead:

for always to one, or several, morning comes,
whose head has fallen over the edge of his bed,
whose face is turned
so that the image of

the city grows down into his open eyes
inverted and distorted. No. I mean
distorted and revealed (Complete Poems 17)

Bishop signals inversion (shorthand of sexology), but her poetics (like Moore's) is much more reliant on steady observation, what seems "distorted" and then becomes "revealed" in a peripheral vision, echoing her well-known sense of kinship with Darwin, whom she described to Anne Stevenson as marching into the unknown, determined to see the off-center.⁵ Darwin's meditations (and Bishop's) coexisted in the context of the "cruel" and "traditional" rooster and "their rustling wives" (35), their desires to dominate and to propagate, and not in the cultural context of happy mothers or women living happily and visibly with other women. Queers may want to propagate their kind, but as such they must do so artificially.

Bishop, like Moore, was locked into the proprieties of her time, so that her "Crusoe in England" is both frank and masked, its irony infusing her male persona's intimation of the love that dare not speak its name ("None of the books has ever got it right" [162]). Bishop's own devastating loss of Lota de Soares, who committed suicide before Bishop drafted this poem, informs her Crusoe's loss of Friday; Bishop and Lota had been together in Brazil for fifteen years. This island, "a sort of cloud-dump" with hissing turtles, waterspouts, and volcanoes, is a microcosm of an impossible love. Of Friday, Bishop's Crusoe will sigh: "If only he had been a woman! / I wanted to propagate my kind, / and so did he, I think, poor boy" (165). This can be read at least two ways: "if only one of us—Lota or I—had been a man." Or "if only we could have transcended natural laws

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of reproduction, or surpassed biological imperatives to become unwed mothers, as it were, with children.”

The risks of loss and of extinction culminate in “Crusoe,” where her hero inhabits an island that could well find a template in Darwin, who was fascinated by the geological history of islands and how they sustained diverse populations through their isolation (the same might be asked of the solitary homosexual). Bishop responds to the queer’s isolation on an island as alternatively wrought with depression and self-pity or imaginatively stimulating—her Crusoe makes his own flute with “the weirdest scale on earth” (164) and “home-brew” (“Home-made, home-made! But aren’t we all?”).

My focus here, however, is on the poem’s implicit illogical question or fantasy: why can’t two mothers or fathers propagate? Before Friday arrives, Crusoe, frustrated with boredom and lack of connection, impishly tries to practice what Darwin called the “mistaken mothering” of the cuckoo:

One day I dyed a baby goat bright red
with my red berries, just to see
something a little different.
And then his mother wouldn’t recognize him. (165)

Longing for something “a little different,” Crusoe intervenes in the recognition between infant and mother, and then dreams of “slitting a baby’s throat, mistaking it / for a baby goat.” Baby or baby goat—still there’s angst over progeny: “nightmares of other islands / stretching away from mine, infinities / of islands, islands spawning islands, / like frogs’ eggs turning into polliwogs / of islands”—both the nightmare of nineteenth-century taxonomy and Darwin in paraphrase, and having to “live / on each and every one, eventually, / for ages, registering their flora, / their fauna, their geography.” Clearly Bishop was of two minds about islands, mothers, and procreation. What might be Darwin’s pleasure is here sheer horror, epitomizing the queer speaker’s anxiety about over-reproduction.

With Friday’s arrival, a crisis of desire comes to the fore: “If only he had been a woman!” Still, it was reading Darwin that partly inspired Bishop’s fantasy of improper reproduction; Friday is, in fact, the nurturing protomother or male mother: “he’d pet the baby goats sometimes, / and race with them, or carry one around.” Broadly, the poet expresses the inexpressible, marshalling her melancholy voice in protest against biological dictates. Bishop’s polyvocal text—a palimpsest of Defoe, Jonathan Swift,

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William and Mary Wordsworth, and of course Darwin's writing—is a means of Moore-like preservation and recreation, a way for Bishop to insert herself into literary tradition while altering it.

Moore and Bishop both affiliate with and resist Darwin, invoking the variant as the queerly fit. During the 1940s, when Bishop and Louise Crane sent Moore a nautilus shell, its various meanings of maternal care and female sexuality were not lost on them, and it provides the basis for Moore's "A Paper Nautilus," with its queer mother who "scarcely // eats until the eggs are hatched":

the intensively
watched eggs coming from
the shell free it when they are freed,—
leaving its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-

laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to. (*Complete Poems* 121–22)

This is not the feared dependency detectable in Darwin or in other poems of Moore and Bishop. Moore seems to ask: if we can't reproduce, might we not trust to the folds of love and aesthetic involution as a means of queer propagation and perhaps, in this case, intermothering?

§

Darwin is a pivotal alternative to Freud in the modernist quest to recast sexual culture. His notions of sexual inheritance and artificial selection clarify what I call the queerly fit in a poetic, aesthetic, and sexual sense. Those apparently unfit as propagators thrive as creators, drawing on materials from literary, mythic, naturalist, and personal sources. The transitional state of Moore's and Bishop's voices, personas, and animals provide, like Darwin's sense of "plastic" forms, necessary counterbalance to Freud's demoralized domestic mother whom the female child apparently must iden-

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tify with if she is to become a woman, properly, in the normative rituals of marriage and childbirth, or rather in the masochistic, passive position Freud so deftly described. This summary is of course oversimplified. But the point is that in Freud's writing on women and homosexuality over the course of his career, he fortified an impossible position for women: they either could turn from "normal" development back to preoedipal perversion and a prehistoric polymorphous sexuality or fall prey to a dreadful identification with the mother as drudge. Freud's sexual model demands that in order for both sexes to participate in normative reproduction, each must resist (at least temporarily) the same-sex parent, and then ultimately identify with that parent: desire and identification can never coexist with the same-sex parent.

Darwin cannot be overlooked, however, in his earlier break from teleological sexuality, allowing scientists and poets alike to examine precise, intermediate, and variable states. I use the figure of Darwin's pigeon fancier to articulate his placement of a male mother into the schema of reproduction and domestication of species. By thinking beyond rigid attachment to fixed or immutable forms of embodiment, Darwin offers an opening for queer writers who seek a reverberant voice in the sciences that questions the stability of sex and gender roles.

Notes

1. In his case study of Dora, Freud writes:

Thus, the perverse fantasy, so shocking to us, of sucking the penis, has the most harmless of origins; it is the reworking of what we might term a "prehistoric" impression of sucking at the breast of the mother or nurse. (472)

While Freud creates a teleology (breast to penis) and attempts to sanitize breast feeding, he actually imbues the nipple with preemptive erotic importance.

2. I explore this relationship in a forthcoming article in *Modernism/Modernity* (Fall 2010).

3. In the film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), Jefferson Smith (played by Jimmy Stewart) brings his own flock of carrier pigeons to the Capitol so he can send letters home to his mother. Evidently the link between mothers, homes, and these birds is a fairly familiar motif, even appropriate for a Hollywood film.

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4. Moore directed Bishop to send submissions directly to Bryher, or Mrs. MacPherson (Bryher's second surname of convenience).

5. Bishop's most often-quoted remark about Darwin occurs in a letter to Stevenson:

I can't believe we are wholly irrational—and I do admire Darwin—But reading Darwin one admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic—and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels the strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown. (qtd. in Millier 336)

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Darwin's Bulldog and Huxley's Ape

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One of the initial difficulties in assessing the impact of a figure like Darwin on literary history is determining to what extent his influence is a function of the man himself—his actual theories, writings, and so forth—or the cultural fantasies that have cropped up around him. Where these fantasies are not conditioned by outright ignorance and misinformation, they often as not stem from crucial misprisions. For this reason, attempts to unmask the real so-and-so behind the signifier are often mooted from a literary standpoint, though there is, of course, real intellectual value in such retrievals. To sidestep some of these issues, I'd like to take a slightly different tack on the question of Darwin's legacy, which is to think about the availability of such misprisions for literary thought rather than rehabilitate an "authentic" Darwinism or, for that matter, deploy his theories in the course of an interpretation. Literary applications of Darwin's scientific theories in recent years (by Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall, for example) have been slow to gather supporters, and that may be because, even while humanities types acknowledge the intrigue of empirical approaches, they tend to share a basic intuition: that understanding Darwin's thought (now more than ever, as the cliché goes) is perhaps more important in its ethical and, ultimately, biopolitical dimension than in its scientific or methodological one.¹

I would contend that this is the upshot of most cultural histories of nineteenth-century Darwinism, like those by Gillian Beer and George Levine. These two critics conclude their works with ethicopolitical ruminations on Hardy and Conrad, respectively—writers who straddle the centennial divide—indicating to my mind a gradual shift away from Victorian formal engagements with Darwinism (for example at the level of plot) toward more modernist philosophical and existential ones.² No

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doubt this distinction between Victorian and modernist is too facile, but maybe less so than we might hope. Certainly biographers of Darwin and T. H. Huxley weary themselves with claims of anachronism: both were modernists before their time, it would seem. One of Huxley's biographers, Adrian Desmond, finds him "so modern that we want to snatch him from his age"; after all, "He coined the word 'agnostic'—and gave the West its existential crisis" (xiii). The point is conceded, though it's hard to shake the niggling sense that Desmond, vivid throughout if a bit swashbuckling in his conclusions, here overstates the case: in many other respects, not least of which is prose style, Huxley remained a consummate Victorian, cracked leather and all. My arguments throughout will therefore reinforce the historical and cultural distinction I find in Beer and Levine, even if the effect is to diminish the modernism of Darwin and Huxley.

What I'd like to do in the following pages is trace a literal genealogy (T. H. Huxley to Aldous Huxley) that involves a conceptual genealogy (Darwinian ethics to Huxleyan biopolitics) and in the process, as part of a wholly personal agenda, commend the importance of Aldous Huxley's 1948 novel *Ape and Essence* for any articulation of Darwin's literary legacy. That novel, more bracingly and explicitly than any other in Huxley's oeuvre, speaks to the impasse of reception Darwin faces in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as we increasingly contemplate (and realize) the exhilarating and horrifying implications of his thought. Other critics, for their part, have glimpsed the kind of reading of the novel I'll offer here, though without elaboration or coordination with T. H. Huxley's writing. June Deery perceptively notes that in *Ape and Essence* Huxley "is pointing to the gap between technological and ethical development, to the sophistication of the means and the imbecility of the ends ("Technology and Gender" 110). I agree with Deery enough to want to extend her claim further to include not just the forces of technological development but those of instrumentalist metaphysics, which underwrite technology. There is in the novel a much more sweeping critique than it is typically given credit for; many critics "provincialize" its context—nuclear proliferation—rather than see its immediate concerns as part of a larger ideological project. To be fair, those same critics can hardly be blamed for declining to read the novel against the backdrop of hoary old Greek preoccupations.³ If, however, as Deery continues, Huxley's *Island* pits "Darwin against Ford" (112), then I would want to suggest that *Ape and Essence* more problematically pits Darwin *avec* Ford—Darwin as both

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antagonist and coauthor of ethical instrumentalism. And perhaps we are drawn to a third, shadowy figure, not Ford but Freud⁴ as a figure of intergenerational conflict: Aldous unequivocally admired T. H., but it was a somewhat distant admiration, one borne of anecdote and reputation rather than direct experience (T. H. died within a year of Aldous's birth [Murray 18–19]). The novel is therefore at least as interesting as an index of oedipal anxieties as it is Cold War ones. We might, though, less tentatively say that in *Ape and Essence*, Aldous sets aside his grandfather's personal and intellectual merits in order to mount an ethical critique of his Darwinism.

In what does this critique consist? For my purposes, I'd like to focus on four elements, which can be laid out schematically:

1. I see *Ape and Essence* as troubled by the absence of a robust ethical distinction between humans and animals in the Darwinian model, an absence the novel assumes and subsequently satirizes.
2. Consequently, if humans exist on a biological continuum with animals, what is the magical quantum of sympathy that transforms cooperative behavior into ethical behavior? The evolutionary narrative of ethics itself is dissatisfactory, leaving us with a kind of sorites paradox: when does ethics becomes ethical?⁵
3. Because it lacks a strong ethical narrative, Darwinism perpetually runs the risk of biopolitically regressive appropriations (by Nazism, racism, sexism, capitalism, etc.: pick your bogeyman).
4. And finally, what Huxley describes in the novel is humankind in a state of creaturely abjection without the possibility of righteousness, an abyssal nihilism whose origins lie just below the surface of Victorian propriety.⁶

Lambent traces

Let us turn then to that milieu and consider how Darwin initially peels the tain from the mirror. For all its sense of sprawling complexity, Victorian culture involved a rather intimate set of people and ideas. Two or at most three degrees of separation are sufficient to connect even its most disparate-seeming nodes. It isn't terribly surprising, then, that much of

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modernism's mythopoeic energies involve effacing genealogical ties to its most immediate forebears and their "stifling," if not provincial, networks. Darwin, unfortunately, is often a casualty of such effacements even if, like all things repressed, he manages, uncannily, to return. In fact, we might say of Darwin what Stanley Corngold says of Kafka: that he created a world "consist[ing] of debased images of a transcendent source that has nonetheless left lambent traces in the mind" (112). Darwin, we might say, is the fourth, unacknowledged hermeneut of suspicion,⁷ the one who saw roiling beneath the surface of life itself a vast, hidden reservoir of energies, a genetic Real that disclosed who we are in ways both shocking and transformative. While Victorian attitudes toward Darwin initially tended to the reactionary, the modernist response was, I think, much more nuanced, mediated largely by technological and political traumas that had knocked humankind from its perch atop (or thereabouts) the great chain of being.

The Anglo American response to Darwin, among Victorians and modernists both, is very much tied up with the Huxley family. As is well known, the autodidact Thomas Henry Huxley was frequently dispatched (with considerable alacrity) against the forces of (usually religious) orthodoxy opposed to Darwinism. His well-known debate with Samuel Wilberforce at Oxford, 1860, was pivotal in the public dissemination and acceptance of Darwin's ideas.⁸ Though T. H. Huxley was a formidable defender of these ideas—it is not for nothing he was known as Darwin's Bulldog—it is remarkable to discover that in fact he maintained deep reservations about many of them. There is in the man a curious mixture of skepticism and devotion that ironizes the debate somewhat: on the side of religion we find Wilberforce, Richard Owen, and the rest motivated by an irrational but nonetheless legalistic authority (the church); on the side of evolutionary science we find Huxley motivated by a rational but nonetheless charismatic authority (Darwin). It would be dramatically overstating things to suggest that Huxley's apologetics on behalf of *The Origin of Species* are of specious origin, but neither can it be ignored that they were (in admittedly few but important cases) fueled more by a personal allegiance to Darwin than to his ideas.

Gradualism is a case in point. Unlike Darwin, Huxley was a saltationist, one who believes evolutionary change occurs not over the course of thousands of generations but in catastrophic leaps of mutation in single generations. "You have loaded yourself with an unnecessary difficulty," he chided Darwin gently, "in adopting *Natura non facit saltum* [nature does

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not make leaps] so unreservedly.”⁹ Such a position, however, awkwardly aligns Huxley with creationists; indeed, according to Richard Dawkins, “saltationism . . . is just a watered-down form of creationism” (248).¹⁰ This is but a further irony, then, that the believer and the heretic should find themselves, if only temporarily, arguing from similar premises. Naturally, there is a world (and an afterworld!) of difference between the agnostic who believes evolution proceeds in a series of *grands jetés* and the dogmatist who believes biodiversity is a matter of divine mandate, but Dawkins’s point is well taken. They are, if nothing else, structurally homologous positions in that they do not countenance the fossil record, but its gaps.

There is a sense, though, and an odd one, in which Huxley is in fact a gradualist, and that is in his ethical theory—an inconsistency I want to register, if briefly, as indicative of a logic of disjunction whenever we pass from evolution to ethics or vice versa. His ethics is marked by what I’m tempted to call a kind of moral autism—an absence of affective categories, even basic ones like happiness—and refers instead to the rawest calculus of survival, which he tends to call “the means of existence” (293 et passim). The closest he comes to an affective category is vague, repeated reference to sympathy, by which he seems to mean something like a cognitive acknowledgment that others also have a stake in securing the means of existence. Such an acknowledgment tends to result in cooperative behaviors (within limits): as Joseph Carroll notes, in a Darwinian paradigm “sympathy is strongly constrained by group-identification” (11). Ethicality, traditionally construed, is that which distinguishes and ennobles human life against the animal existence from whence it emerged; and yet if we maintain, as does Huxley, that ethicality consists primarily in sympathy, and if sympathy is defined as a cognitive operation resulting in cooperation, then are we not, really, drawn back down among the animals? For surely animals cooperate, and in the higher orders cooperate consciously, for the betterment of all. There are even apparent acts of self-sacrifice. What we are left with is not, then, an ethical distinction between man and beast so much as a proto-Heideggerian ontological one: unlike animals that can enter into “ethical” cooperative relations (“ethical” in Huxley’s denatured sense), humans are the only creatures that have as their mode of being the capacity to relate to their cooperative relations. Or as Heidegger famously put it, “the stone . . . is *worldless* [*weltlos*]; the animal is *poor in world* [*weltarmut*]; man is *world-forming* [*weltbildend*]]” (177).

We are right, I think, to be disappointed by such a conclusion. Not

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only do we, from our post-Derridean vantage, rather suspect Heidegger's distinction of being less than substantive, we are also struck by the way it enfeebls ethics itself (in the name of ontological retrenchment), particularly an ethics that tries to account for relations traversing the human-animal divide. Though the title of T. H. Huxley's famous Romanes lecture of 1893, "Evolution and Ethics," is meant to be heard disjunctively—ethics supposedly lying outside the logic of evolution—we find the two terms collapsing into each other, rhetorically and conceptually. Let us examine a passage from Huxley's prolegomena to the lecture:

I have termed the gradual strengthening of the social bond, which, though it arrest the struggle for existence inside society, up to a certain point improves the chances of society, as a corporate whole, in the cosmic struggle—the ethical process . . . [W]hen the ethical process has advanced so far as to secure every member of the society in the possession of the means of existence, the struggle for existence, as between man and man, within that society is, *ipso facto*, at an end. (302)

Though time and time again he declares that this socioethical evolution—the "gradual strengthening of the social bond"—in no way mimics the processes of natural evolution, they are practically indistinguishable in their language and logic. Instead of a pack or herd we have the "corporate whole" by which the chances of a society's survival are improved; processes of natural selection are likewise sublimated as a "cosmic struggle"—indeed, the most successful, "civilized" societies are those which are most cooperative, and those which are most cooperative are deemed the most ethical.

The question needs to be asked: is such an ethics *ethical*? Certainly an austere, antinormative ethicist like Levinas would answer in the resounding negative. For Levinas ethics emerges in the uniquely human capacity for "saintliness," an "ontological absurdity . . . [whereby] the concern for others is greater than the concern for oneself" ("Utility of Insomnia" 128).¹¹ In other words, for Levinas, what makes humans ethical is the capacity for counterinstinctive generosity. *Counterinstinctive* is an important qualifier, since we've already noted how animals seem to exhibit self-sacrificing behavior.¹² What Levinas has in mind are the mysterious, quotidian acts of politeness that transgress or transcend kinship or even species boundaries. As he frequently and charmingly expressed it in interviews: "*'Après vous': cette formule de politesse devrait être la plus belle défini-*

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tion de notre civilisation.” Levinas certainly wasn’t the first to think about the nature of ethics and civilization, and yet in a way he precedes even those who came before him. Just as the world of Kafka was, for Walter Benjamin, incomparably older than myth (799), so too is Levinas older than Aristotle. Rather than conceiving of ethics as a system of rationally defensible or universalizable behaviors, Levinas sought to articulate ethics as the very foundation of being. To pass muster with Levinas, then, would indicate an ethics of exceptional rigor, though admittedly an ethics still exclusively human.

Whether emblemized in cooperation or politeness, civilization bears the onerous mantle of vouchsafing an ethics unique to our species. For Levinas this means articulating existential categories inaccessible to animals: “To be human means to live as if one were not a being among beings. As if, through human spirituality, the categories of being inverted into an ‘otherwise than being’” (*Ethics and Infinity* 100). In his own way, Huxley too wants to point us toward an “otherwise than being,” though he has no recourse to Levinas’s metaphysical vocabulary. For him, justice is the concept that begins to displace cooperation as the hallmark of civilization, because justice, while carrying with it the notion of moral volition (righteous/wicked intent), can be described in purely material terms even if it too “underwent a gradual sublimation from punishment and reward according to acts, to punishment and reward according to desert” (315). In the cooperative or sympathetic model, the only thing that matters, ethically, is the extent to which the “rules” of the given society are observed or not. Justice entails an added distinction “between the case of involuntary and that of wilful misdeed; between a merely wrong action and a guilty one.” (314). However promising a concept, though, justice is advanced in a way that seems contrary to Huxley’s intent. This contrariety has two aspects, one rhetorical and one conceptual.

The rhetorical aspect first, then: even when promoting the ethical distinction between human and animal life, Huxley can’t help but frame it in terms of zoological simile. “Society is impossible unless those who are associated agree to observe certain rules of conduct towards one another,” he begins, sensibly enough, only to continue:

Wolves could not hunt in packs except for the real, though unexpressed, understanding that they should not attack one another during the chase. The most rudimentary polity is a pack of men living under the like tacit, or expressed, understanding. (314)

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Setting aside the question of what the word *understanding* might mean when applied both to wolves and humans, how ought we to countenance this unsettling comparison? He does throw humanity a bone, as it were, acknowledging that humans "have made the very important advance upon wolf society [of agreeing] to use the force of the whole body against individuals who violate it and in favor of those who observe it." This distinction between human and wolf society has the quality of being at once profound and flimsy. It is flimsy, of course, because pack animals like wolves routinely use the force of the whole body against individuals who violate the rules—by shuffling the feeding order among pack members, policing mating partners, or ostracizing the violator. (And I'm speaking now with the full authority of one who regularly watches *Animal Planet*!) But how is the distinction profound?

It's profound in the sense that it marks what Huxley calls "a sort of compromise between the public and private conception of justice" (315). Presumably among animals such a compromise could not exist—they lack self-irony—whereas among humans, life is largely defined by the gap between private aspirations and public demands. The sheep in the *Far Side* comic who stands above the complacent herd shouting "Wait! Wait! Listen to me! . . . We don't HAVE to be just sheep!" is funny because if there is one thing a sheep must do, it is be a sheep. It is humans alone who have the dubious luxury of questioning the nature of their existence. In terms of Huxley's broader argument, though, the self-irony that makes justice (and therefore ethics) possible may be a wolf in sheep's clothing, for in it is the undoing of moral value. One's sense is that for Huxley, without self-irony there is only instinct—behavior dictated by nature—either evolution or ethics; self-irony therefore is a prerequisite of moral value, the little reflective gap that opens a space for "righteous" action as opposed to selfish, self-preserving, or autonomic action alone. At the same time, self-irony, insofar as it marks the shift away from the necessities of nature to the contingencies of human society, undoes moral value because such value has no calculus, no consistency, no assurance of realization.¹³ The moment of this undoing is curiously the moment when Huxley is most explicit about the disjunct between evolution and ethics:

If there is a generalization from the facts of human life which has the assent of thoughtful men in every age and country, it is that the violator of ethical rules constantly escapes the

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punishment which he deserves; that the wicked flourishes like a green bay tree, while the righteous begs his bread; that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children; that, in the realm of nature, ignorance is punished just as severely as wilful wrong; and that thousands upon thousands of innocent beings suffer for the crime, or the unintentional trespass of one. (315)

In short, justice, unlike evolution, fails. And since justice has overtaken sympathy as the central term in Huxley's ethics, that means ethics fails as well. It is failure, finally, that confirms the disjunct, that proves that ethics is not proctored by nature; it is failure that marks out the domain of human life from that of the animal world; and it is failure, ultimately, that provides the basis for justice. So here is the conceptual paradox to go along with the rhetorical one mentioned above: the proof that ethics escapes the logic of evolution has the effect of strengthening the claim of evolution on ethics: were we able somehow to coordinate the workings of our moral existence with those of our biological one, we wouldn't have to worry any longer about the maddening lapses of justice Huxley enumerates. The danger, however, is clear: there are all too many ideologies ready to "naturalize" their ethics—and we can all think of at least one in recent history for whose crime "thousands upon thousands of innocent beings" suffered.

The point here isn't to deride Huxley for lack of clairvoyance so much as to clarify the ethical stakes of Darwinism (later explored in *Ape and Essence*). The advantage of a Darwinian ethic is certainly its materialism (earthly punishment or reward) even if, as Huxley notes with a hint of disapproval, it has been sublimated by airier notions of guilt and innocence. Moral volition, intention, motivation: these complicate the possibility of justice, yes, but at least they aren't metaphysical. Intent can be established logically, deductively, juridically—in a word, scientifically. A Levinasian ethic, on the other hand, involves all sorts of exotic, diaphanous terms without natural correlates. Whichever position one prefers (materialist or metaphysical), to me the persistent ethicality of ethics is attested by this: that the proximity of human and animal life that we accede to on the biological level still troubles us on the ethical one. Perhaps this anxiety redounds on teleological questions: while it may not be shocking to attribute a certain aimlessness to evolution (the same forces giving rise indifferently to bacterium, platypus, and human), it is harder to think

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that human society is likewise adrift. Conditioned by religion, by secular humanism, by Hegel, by whatever, we like to think of things as generally improving (even when they most certainly are not), as heading toward some vaguely utopic or anyway preferable state of affairs. It is comforting, I suppose, that Huxley felt the same way.

Despite the fact that he disapproved of Lamarckism, viewing it as thinly veiled metaphysics, Huxley apparently had no difficulty consenting to the notion of a socioethical telos, indeed to the point where social conflict is surpassed altogether because the means of existence are uniformly distributed, mooted competition for resources. That Huxley viewed human society as a largely agonistic enterprise is interesting and perplexing in itself, but more perplexing still is the fact that his ethics is grounded on the logic of natural selection even while he claims that "the kind of evolution which is brought about in the state of nature cannot take place [in society]" (302).¹⁴ In fairness to Huxley, I should mention that the basis of this distinction (between natural and socioethical evolution) is that in nature organisms are in direct combat with each other, whereas society is in combat with nature itself. This is a distinction we can partly grant even while admitting its naïveté. Assuming that gladiatorial competition over resources and subsequent processes of selection within and between societies are only metaphorically related to what occurs in nature, we are still presented with a very compelling and troubling metaphor, one that doesn't exactly jibe with the possibility of an *ethical* ethics. As Michael Helfand formulates it, "Huxley denied positive ethical authority to nature only to reintroduce evolutionary theory as the sole rationale for an ethic of personal and social struggle" (169).

"Sole rationale" strikes me as inaccurate—we have been using the softer language of "metaphor" and "homology"—but the basic insight is more than valid. Huxley's is, of course, not a mimetic ethic: we cannot look to nature for models of behavior (though as indicated earlier, rhetorically and conceptually, nature is unavoidable). Neither, though, can we look to the heavens or ecclesiastical authority. What remains falls somewhere between Malthus and Mill, I suppose. Huxley puts the best possible (counterrevolutionary) face on it, and in that gesture comes as close to a Levinasian apothegm as his Darwinism would allow:

In place of ruthless self-assertion [ethics] demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall

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help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to *the fitting of as many as possible to survive.*
(327–28; my italics)

But in what such a “fitting” shall consist has haunted us this last century!

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe

I’d like, then, to reread Aldous Huxley’s novel *Ape and Essence* in light of the ethical conundra passed down from his grandfather. Huxley further commends himself for comparison as perhaps modernism’s key fantasist of the kinds of technological and political traumas implied above, traumas that had the effect of displacing humanity as stewards of Creation. Perhaps a third motivation: among scholars, *Ape and Essence* is almost universally reviled, which the contrarian in me interprets as proof positive that it is, in fact, his secret masterpiece. Comparing it to *Brave New World*, Rudolph Schmerl deems it “an almost incredibly bad novel,” its symbolism “labored, crude, and spoiled by the unnecessary explanations of the narrator” and its originality of form an “indifference to form itself” (334). George Woodcock initially regards it as “a pendant to *Brave New World*” (a mild, if dismissive, judgment), only to brand it later as evidence of “further decline in Huxley’s literary creativeness,” a work that “misses the directness of narrative, the psychological concentration, that were the virtues of the earlier nouvelle,” lacking the “unity of an imagined world essential to a convincing fantasy” (254).¹⁵

The attentive reader will have noticed an apparent or partial contradiction: Schmerl faults the novel for too many narrative intrusions; Woodcock in effect thinks there weren’t enough. That’s a bit of a hedge on my part, but not at all a complete mischaracterization. I admit there are ways to reconcile these seemingly contradictory complaints—that *Ape and Essence* on the one hand suffers from unnecessary narration and at the same time lacks narration—but it requires just enough brow-furrowing in the meantime to conclude, if only provisionally, that both critics may have missed the mark. The inconsistencies of *Ape and Essence*—we can certainly agree that there *are* inconsistencies, even if we differ about their meaning and value—in fact remind me of another underappreciated dystopian satire: Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s *Kappa*. In both works it is as if the satirical energies of the authors, their moral outrage, sear through the generic pretensions of the form. Jorge Luis Borges eloquently defended

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the "lapses" of Akutagawa's novella in a way we might apply with equal patience to *Ape and Essence*:

In *Kappa* the novelist employs the familiar artifice of blasting the human race under the guise of a fantastic species; perhaps he was inspired by Swift's "yahoos," or the penguins of Anatole France, or the strange kingdoms crossed by the stone monkey in the Buddhist allegory. Halfway through the story, Akutagawa forgets the satiric conventions: it hardly matters to him that the Kappa, who are water imps, turn into humans who talk about Marx, Darwin or Nietzsche. According to the literary canons, this negligence is a flaw. In fact, the last pages of the story are infused with an indescribable melancholy; we sense that, in the author's imagination, everything has collapsed, even the dreams of his art.¹⁶ (348)

I find that last sentence very moving and just as true of *Ape and Essence* as *Kappa*: their undeniable pathos is that the frustrated anger of both works seems to unravel and discomfit them, and why not? Reviewing the novel (with disappointment) for *The Nation* in 1948, Anthony Bower is more right than he knows when he remarks, "The contemporary satirist [who must compete with the horrors of Buchenwald and Hiroshima] is in the unfortunate position of being almost forced to go too far" (qtd. in Watt 369). The satiric space is defined by its outstripping the indignities of reality, but what can the writer do when reality is itself so repugnantly distorted that there seems no room for exaggeration? The form of exaggeration must itself be exaggerated, it must break down or blow up in order to indicate an evil beyond satirizing. We can forgive a critic, then, for not seeing what is in effect a blind spot.

That said, even the novel's more temperate critics credit it but little.¹⁷ To the extent anybody at all pays any attention to it, it is routinely considered a straightforward (and imperfect) satire of the nuclear age—a screed against the militarization of science and so forth. It is certainly all that, though Sanford E. Marovitz is right to point out that Huxley gives little evidence of a strong antinuclear agenda. Searching through the letters written while Huxley worked on *Ape and Essence*, Marovitz finds an altogether different incentive for the novel, one that more directly invokes the ethical context I've developed thus far. A letter to Anita Loos in early 1947 finds Huxley pondering a novel

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about, among other things, a post-atomic-war society in which the chief effect of the gamma radiations had been to produce a race of men and women who don't make love all the year round, but have a brief mating season. The effect of this on politics, religion, ethics etc would be something very interesting and amusing to work out. (*Letters* 534).

The "post-atomic-war" business seems more the pretext than the context of the project. Marovitz concludes that Huxley's concerns were more playfully directed at issues of "aberrant sexuality" than "nuclear holocaust" (123), though neither is that the whole story.¹⁸ By my reading, the intended ground is finally "politics, religion, [and] ethics," and it is in this register that the novel might best be read.

For Marovitz, Huxley's lack of commitment to the antinuclear message of the novel ultimately diminishes it, which is an odd conclusion coming from one who so adroitly demonstrates that that is not the context in which *Ape and Essence* was conceived. Furthermore, Marovitz cites Huxley's foreword to the 1969 edition of *Brave New World* to indicate Huxley's preoccupation not with the physics of atom smashing but with the life sciences, which control not merely the power to destroy life but, more profoundly, the means to "modify [its] natural forms and expressions" (x). It's no wonder, then, that *Ape and Essence* disappoints as a satire of atomic anxiety: it doesn't appear ever to have been intended as such (except coincidentally). It seems high time, then, that the novel was reexamined within the problematic of post-Darwinian ethics.

The title practically cries out for such a reading. It's an allusion, first of all, to Isabella's famous speech in act 2, scene 2 of *Measure for Measure*, where she decries man's predilection for abuse of power:

... man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep

This speech is largely a refraction of the play's central theme, the difficulty of right action, and the play is, with the possible exception of *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare's most ethically driven. It is a "problem" play, overtly

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and schematically.¹⁹ Add to this allusion the resonances that would only be natural for the grandson of Darwin's Bulldog, and the title begins to sound like Aldous Huxley's cryptographic rendering of "Evolution and Ethics": the "Ape" as metonym of "Evolution" and a natural constraint on morality, an "Essence," instead of a field of choices, an "Ethics." (The disjunctive *and* of the earlier work now ironically conjunctive.) We might reconceive the novel, therefore, as a continuation of a line of thought inaugurated in the 1890s and now being visited in the morbid wake of its refutation in the Holocaust. We need not automatically register Aldous Huxley's reservations about evolutionary ethics in the context of his mysticism (man as the "spiritual animal"), though that is a move *Ape and Essence* conditions us for. We might more immediately coordinate it with biopolitical discourse conditioned by fascism, Nazi eugenics, etc. (the fallout of Social Darwinism).

The novel seems to announce this shift in its opening lines, which refer to an enormity as emblematic in its own way as anything evoked by Buchenwald or Hiroshima:

It was the day of Gandhi's assassination; but on Calvary the sightseers were more interested in the contents of their picnic baskets than in the possible significance of the, after all, rather commonplace event they had turned out to witness. In spite of all the astronomers can say, Ptolemy was perfectly right: the center of the universe is here, not there. Gandhi might be dead; but across the desk in his office, across the lunch table in the Studio Commissary, Bob Briggs was concerned to talk only about himself.

As if to intensify the contrast, Huxley buttresses each "but" with a semicolon: on the one hand, Gandhi's death, and on the other, "commonplace" events like picnics. (Huxley's anger is sensed in the tastelessness of the comparison.) Gandhi's and Jesus's deaths are, of course, icons of biopolitical abjection, the result of passive resistance to colonial oppression, the testimony and refutation of the human body as ground zero of sovereign power. The body, finally, is killed, and in that moment becomes a weapon against power, because ultimately one is more than the body, etc. Something like Gandhi's assassination, where, in effect, the rubber meets the road ethically, is straightaway laid alongside a now-laughable, mistaken conception of nature—geocentrism (Ptolemy, fittingly, appears

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in the center of the paragraph)—metaphorically associated with self-centeredness. The event doesn't register because we are all of us little universes unto ourselves.

For the narrator, one of two down-at-heel studio executives, Gandhi's death signifies little beyond the moral equilibration of all actions. Bob Briggs unironically compares his decision to take his mistress to Acapulco with Martin Luther's decision to stand firm before the Diet at Worms (*Ich kann nicht anders*); the narrator ironically compares Briggs's decision with that of Gandhi, who "couldn't do anything but resist oppression nonviolently and go to prison and finally get shot" (2). The opening pages set up a kind of biopolitical constellation—Jesus, Martin Luther, Gandhi—against a banal ethical one—Bob Briggs, his wife Miriam, his mistress Elaine. Briggs's tawdry dilemma, to divorce or not to divorce, becomes the irreverent echo of Hamlet's profound one. And so on and so forth: the contrasts are dutifully laid out, though complicated by the narrator's cynicism and sarcastic intelligence.

While Huxley's attitude toward Gandhi as biopolitical hero, say, might seem more or less transparent, it is far more difficult to suss out the narrator's position. He concludes that Gandhi believed in neither art nor science, which is "why we killed him" (8). When asked about that curious pronoun, he responds, "Yes, we. The intelligent, the active, the forward looking, the believers in Order and Perfection." While the narrator doesn't go so far, at this point, to indict (Social) Darwinism itself, he does invoke two of its avatars, quickly linked with fascist fantasies of an administered society and dialectically opposed to the "cosmic facts of real people and the inner Light" (9). While he seems disgusted with the social order of which he is a part and possesses a clear-eyed estimation of its failings (it is "diabolic," "satanic," a "collective madness" [8]), yet he also seems to critique the necessary failure of idealists from the viewpoint of a resigned realpolitiker. For now, though, let it suffice that the specter of Darwinian ethics is raised and set against concrete biopolitical issues.

Finding no answers to any of these questions and venally intrigued by a once-rejected manuscript, the two producers travel to the desert in search of a cantankerous (and, as it turns out, deceased) screenwriter named William Tallis. The bulk of the novel consists of Tallis's bizarre screenplay "Ape and Essence." The screenplay in short order supplants the novel (we never return to the studio execs in the desert), which is why I'm half-convinced (against critics like Schmerl who think the formal

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novelty of the book is "an indifference to form") that Huxley is offering something like a microallegory of the evolution of genre: the novel giving way to film—the screenplay in effect the missing link in that transition.

Its prologue features opposing baboon armies, each with an Albert Einstein on a leash, whom they force to release devastating biological agents (*bacillus mallei*, we're informed) on the opposing baboon populations. The plot picks up 100 years later as a party of scientists (Fellows of the Royal Society of New Zealand) lands on what was once the Southern California coast in search of the remnants of civilization. (Having worked in Hollywood for some years, Huxley seems to revel in the prospect of its utter annihilation!) One of their number, a botanist named Alfred Poole—how hard it must have been not to call him Eugene—is captured by a bestial society of devil-worshipping mutants. The Devil, they reason, has clearly taken over: just look around. This society spends the better part of its time robbing graves in search of usable clothing and burning books for warmth and fuel. Poole eventually becomes a reluctant anthropo-primatologist among them and is horrified anew with each discovery. Shockingly, infants with too many nipples, say, or not enough thumbs are routinely murdered in the name of "purification." In fact, procreation and sexuality are stigmatized—most prayers involve requests for "detumescence"—not because the Belial worshippers (as they style themselves) existentially deny the importance of perpetuating the species in the wake of "the Thing" (World War III), but because radioactive fallout has intensified germ-line mutations outside the evolutionary logic of natural selection. Whether these are humans or mutants or apes is irrelevant: what is striated evolutionarily for T. H. Huxley (hierarchies/phyla) is smooth biopolitically for Aldous Huxley (bare life). We might reiterate at this point the inconsistencies in T. H. Huxley's ethics as against his biology: while rigid distinctions exist between species (not least between humans and other animals) with evolution occurring in violent leaps, yet there is a gradual ethical drift toward cooperation, sympathy, and ultimately justice among humans that draws its imagery, if not its logic, from the evolutionary forces common to humans and animals both. For Aldous Huxley, on the other hand, life—human, animal, or mutant—is conceived as a homogeneous state of creaturely abjection in the face of sovereign power.

Sovereign power, Carl Schmitt theorized, is the capacity to determine the exception; in fact, we might even say that sovereign power only exists, or only exists fully, *when* it determines the exception (5). It is therefore in

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the interest of sovereign power to declare a paradoxical “state of exception” in which it can exercise itself unimpeded by nuisances like constitutional law. In the novel, this state of exception is perpetuated in part through a hellish catechism conducted by a Satanic Science Practitioner: “Question: to what fate is Man predestined? Answer: Belial has, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity elected all now living to everlasting perdition” (94). *Perdition*, etymologically linked to ruin, loss, and absence, functions as an uncanny synonym for the state of exception, which is, Giorgio Agamben reminds us, “essentially an empty space, in which a human action with no relation to law stands before a norm with no relation to life” (*State of Exception* 86). In the circular logic of biopolitical arrest, the citizens of this wasteland deserve their abjection because “Belial has perverted and corrupted [them] in all the parts of [their] being” (94)—in other words, because they are the exception. Identification with the exception reduces us to what Agamben elsewhere calls “bare life” (*Homo Sacer* 4 et passim), life conceived solely in its protoplasmic, material (or dare we say Darwinian?) dimension.

For Agamben the concept emerges directly from (and returns directly to) the debate surrounding evolution. After briefly sketching the early history of this debate—from Darwin and T. H. Huxley to Ernst Haeckel and Heymann Steinthal—Agamben concludes that it “actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the exclusion of an outside” (*The Open* 37). Like the hapless Belialists of Huxley’s novel,

the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew . . . neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*. (38)

In this production of bare life, then, sovereign power and evolutionary logic are united. How is this so? For Agamben, evolutionary logic has relied on the articulation of a human/animal divide fraught with aporias. Quite literally, we presuppose the human when we identify speech with humanity and use its possession to define ourselves against animals. The fragility of such a distinction becomes increasingly apparent as we consider the strange borderline cases it engenders. It also tends to cre-

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ate alienating zones of the nonhuman within the human. These zones of indeterminacy are not just paleontological or zoological anomalies, they become visible in apartheid, in genocide, in anti-Semitism, racism, and so forth. There is, subsequently, a deep, condemning irony when the narrator of *Ape and Essence* intones, "Only in the knowledge of his own Essence / Has any man ceased to be many monkeys" (75).²⁰ For what is that Essence, the novel asks? What good is it if it authors or collaborates with biopolitical conditions that diminish it?

Eric Santner, summarizing Freud's thesis in *Moses and Monotheism* that human cultures seem to require foundational acts of violence—what he calls "suspension" (essentially primordial acts of "exception")—concludes that "the great conceptual, ethical, and political problem [is] to grasp the special nature of the violence at work in the event of such a suspension and to understand the *libidinal economy* of the form of life it inaugurates" (73–74; Santner's italics). The same is true of *Ape and Essence*, and it is precisely the violence of culture formation, together with the libidinal economy sustaining it, that Huxley so brutally describes. If we are proper dialecticians, we of course welcome Darwinism as an important stage along life's way, one that has helped rescue civilization from benighted superstition and furthered the cause of human thought and so on and so forth, but the satirical impetus of Huxley's novel (the aspect of it that most addresses the question of Darwin's literary legacy) is that if we assume the validity of Darwinian ethics, the violent foundational act of any human culture, whether it be the drowning of the Egyptian horde in the Red Sea or a baboon-induced World War III, will have its origins in our depraved, creaturely essence. The horror of the novel, in other words, is not the mutants themselves or even their culture, but the way in which Poole (and we the readers) come to recognize the logic of our own culture, our own form of life. The Belialists, their culture, and its awful eugenics have been inaugurated and (perhaps worse) grotesquely rationalized on religious grounds by a theocratic bureaucracy of Archimandrites, and the novel asks us by what right we consider ourselves any different.

For such a bold anagnorisis, the novel concludes rather gently. Its climax (pun intended) occurs during a phantasmagoric two-week orgy where Poole confronts the Arch-Vicar about certain, shall we say, indelicacies of administration. Poole then runs away with Loola (a local love interest) in search of a subversive society of sexually liberated "Hots" who have likewise rejected Belialism. On the way they stumble upon the

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gravestone of one William Tallis 1882–1948; on it is writ some lines from Shelley's "Adonaïs," which Poole recites from a duodecimo copy he earlier saved from the Archimandrite's fire:

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

Jerome Meckier writes of this conclusion that "Poole's experiences on the animal plane take him out of himself and out of time while awakening him into the world of spiritual experience" (281). I agree with what Meckier is getting at in this scene, though I'm tempted to render it more accurately this way: Poole's experiences on the creaturely plane return him to himself and reinstall him in history while awakening him into the world of ethical experience. It may seem a series of quibbling transpositions, but it's worth remembering that though "Adonaïs" deploys the pastoral idiom of transcendence, of deities and such, it is in fact an elegy to Keats and a testament to the durability of earthly affective bonds, of friendship—in short, an invocation of the ethical sublime—and it is on this note that Huxley chose to conclude his otherwise morbid ruminations on post-Darwinian life!

Notes

1. The scientific and methodological content of Darwin's thought has of course long since been vetted and assimilated, even if controversy remains over its accuracy and factuality in some quarters. The ethical and biopolitical content redounds rather on the human meaning of Darwin's thought, which remains an open question. The Heisenberg uncertainty principle presents us with an analogous situation: what is (still!) perceived as something of a crisis in philosophy and the humanities is business as usual in physics. That is to say, while the aporia itself is the same for scientists and philosophers, the meaning of the aporia is radically different. From a crass scientific standpoint, Darwin is either

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right or wrong; from a humanistic standpoint, the issue isn't whether Darwin is vindicated but how he has influenced and continues to influence culture, superficially and in its deeper structures. That influence has far less to do with Darwin's actual claims than the position assumed in culture by the signifier: to put it a bit gnomically, it's not what Darwin says, but what "Darwin" says.

2. In *Aldous Huxley and the Mysticism of Science* June Deery offers what I consider a smart, though standard, account:

Modernist writers were typically seen wringing their hands over the moral wasteland as they watched the blind approach of science. Like other educated and even uneducated citizens, [Aldous] Huxley feared that the collapse of religion inevitably entailed the collapse of ethics.
(133)

3. Anxiety over the gap between technology and ethics no doubt predates the Greeks as well, but they were likely the first to self-consciously adopt a cultural virtue, *egrateia* (temperance), intended to check technical imperatives. Jacques Ellul notes that for the Greeks, "The rejection of technique [by which he means not only technology but also instrumentalist metaphysics generally] was a deliberate, positive activity involving self-mastery, recognition of destiny, and the application of a given conception of life" (29). No virtue, of course, completely puts paid to the vice it attempts to remedy, and here is no exception; each generation, each civilization has had to deal with this gap anew. It was certainly a preoccupation of Huxley's British precursors in the nineteenth century: as Shelley famously lamented,

our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.
(39)

My thanks to Jonathan Greenberg for reminding me of this passage. Shelley, as I will note toward the end of this essay, is in a way a central, if spectral, figure in *Ape and Essence*.

4. The pun appears in *Brave New World* as a cryptonym: "Our Ford—or our Freud, as for some inscrutable reason he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters—our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life" (25).

5. I am put in mind of the passage in Nabokov's *Despair* where his deranged narrator reasons:

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Let us suppose, I kill an ape. Nobody touches me. Suppose it is a particularly clever ape. . . . By ascending these subtle steps circumspectly, I may climb up to Leibniz or Shakespeare and kill them, and nobody will touch me, as it is impossible to say where the border was crossed.
(210)

Is the Darwinian forced to accept something like this absurd argument when it comes to ethics?

6. The nihilism I invoke here isn't precisely or necessarily or uniquely Victorian, but that association would certainly be strongest for Aldous Huxley, writing in the long shadow of T. H. *Creaturely abjection* would have any number of specific referents for him, not least of which would be imperialist and military subjections wherein human life is reduced to its bodily, most animal essence. For theorists like Eric Santner and Giorgio Agamben (whose concept of "bare life" is analogous), such a reduction has the tendency to disqualify the possibility of moral excellence or righteousness because these cannot be accounted for biometrically. I have, however, written elsewhere about the possibility of deriving (or preserving) an ethics from such conditions of creaturely abjection. For more on creaturely abjection, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; and Santner.

7. It has always struck me as more than a little telling that Darwin did not rate alongside Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as one of Ricoeur's schoolmasters, united in "common opposition to a phenomenology of the sacred" (32).

8. For an elaboration of the stakes of the debate and its fallout, see J. Vernon Jensen. See also Paul White 58–66.

9. Letter to Darwin 23 November 1859. Qtd. in Leonard Huxley 189.

10. While there are any number of equivocations we should want to attach to Dawkins's polemical claim here, are we not still forced to acknowledge its gist if not its truth? According to this view, the creationist looks at the fossil record and sees only the gaps, which negatively prove the intervention of God; the saltationist likewise focuses on the gaps as proof of a suspension or transcendence (take your pick) of the otherwise apparent, "demonstrable" logic of evolution: gradualism. What they share is a tendency to refute what is seen based on something unseen. I think saltationists and creationists alike are less rankled by this claim than the subsequent one: that such refutations are necessarily and embarrassingly illogical or unempirical, that all negativities, in effect, are "theological."

11. Readers interested in Levinas's engagement with Darwin are encouraged to read Robert Bernasconi.

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12. And I suppose such qualifiers are necessary to defend against those who sentimentalize and anthropomorphize animal behaviors (and if you've ever perused the message boards of *Meerkat Manor*, you know their numbers are legion). The practical significance of the qualification is this: while you may have occasion to see a raccoon risk her life to save her cubs from a burning tree, you'll likely not see her do the same for a nest of sparrow chicks, unless she's planning to eat them. For a provocative take on the question of animal generosity, see Levinas's autobiographical essay "The Name of the Dog."

13. Here are the two sides of the aporia for Huxley: on the one hand, if morality is always realized, it dissolves as a category that transcends nature; on the other hand, if morality has no assurance of ever being realized, it dissolves as a category that transcends irony. For Huxley, morality means an appeal to something beyond nature, yet rooted within it. What is that "something"? The remainder of his essay is largely a comparative survey of various moral systems (Vedic, Buddhist, Stoic, etc.) and their attempts to answer that question. The material kernel of morality that Huxley draws from this survey (rather eccentrically) is the need to resist and subdue, rather than imitate or ignore, nature. Ironically enough, then, Huxley's morality is imaged as subjection.

14. He goes on to say that "direct selection, after the fashion of the horticulturist and the breeder, neither has played, nor can play, any important part in the evolution of society." Naturally, he cannot be faulted, or faulted overly, for failing to anticipate Nazi "horticulture," but surely he must have been aware of selective breeding in the rhetoric of the slave trade (the extent to which it was actually practiced is still a matter of some debate, I understand). Julian Huxley, in a Romanes Lecture offered fifty years after his grandfather's, was justifiably preoccupied with the problem of Nazi ethics and its relation to evolutionary thought. The year, of course, was 1943. For more on the Nazi appropriation of Darwin, see Elana Gomel.

15. We will not concern ourselves here with the curious requirement that fantasies be "convincing."

16. In substituting *Ape and Essence* for *Kappa*, we will have to bracket for the moment the fact that Borges held Huxley in low esteem, at least the early Huxley. He mellows toward the Englishman as the latter enters his mystical and psychedelic phase, but reviewing an Everyman edition of Huxley's short fiction and poetry in 1937, Borges can only ask "What is one to think of these melancholy exercises? They are not unskillful, they are not stupid, they are not extraordinarily boring: they are, simply, worthless" (180). Borges's sensibility, exquisite as a bit of chinoiserie, is as much to blame here as anything Huxley could be faulted for. If Borges had a weakness as a critic, it is that he

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too frequently condemned a poet for not being Robert Browning or Omar Khayyám!

17. Where it is not damned with faint praise, it is passed over in silence. It certainly didn't pass muster in Peter Bowering's important retrospective. All of Huxley's novels merit individual chapters, with the exception of *Ape and Essence* and *The Genius and the Goddess*; of his eleven novels, those two, apparently, were not major enough.

18. Marovitz actually seems a bit surprised to discover how little attention Huxley ultimately paid the prospect of nuclear war, "[g]iven his concern and fears over nuclear armament as he expressed them in the late 1940s" (121–22). Huxley was more vexed by the ethicopolitical stakes—"the war-making mania among nations" (122)—than nuclear conflict per se.

19. Even *The Merchant of Venice* makes a more comprehensible attempt at a romantic subplot than is had between Isabella and the Duke of Vienna.

20. The philosophical aphorist E. M. Cioran similarly quips, "It is not by genius, it is by suffering, by suffering only, that one ceases to be a marionette" (213). Both instances speak to the terrifying and necessary price of our humanity.

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The “Dog-Man”: Race, Sex, Species, and Lineage in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*

Deirdre Coleman

In J. M. Coetzee’s most recent novel, *Summertime*, Sophie Denoël, one of the characters interviewed for a fictive posthumous biography of Coetzee, comments that the author took a “rather abstract, rather anthropological attitude” toward black South Africa. She continues: “He had no *feeling* for black South Africans. . . . They might be his fellow citizens but they were not his countrymen . . . at the back of his mind they continued to be *they* as opposed to *us*” (232; italics in original).¹ Sophie’s description of the fictional Coetzee’s “anthropological attitude” recalls the figure of David Lurie in *Disgrace*, puzzling over his daughter’s African neighbor, Petrus. On the one hand Petrus purports to be Lucy’s protector, but on the other hand he seems to have been complicit in some way in her gang rape, the massacre of her dogs, and the setting alight of Lurie himself. On Lurie’s best reading, Petrus would, as a fellow farmer, probably assist Lucy in a crisis. On the worst reading, Petrus engaged three men to teach his daughter a lesson. But all this is too simple, Lurie concludes:

The real truth, he suspects, is something far more—he casts around for the word—*anthropological*, something it would take months to get to the bottom of, months of patient, unhurried conversations with dozens of people, and the offices of an interpreter. (118; italics in original)

Here, in a humorously clichéd summary of the methodologies of anthropology, we see Coetzee’s narrative technique in action, a technique

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learnt from Flaubert: namely, the ability “to enter and leave a character’s consciousness with a minimum of obtrusiveness and to express judgments without seeming to do so” (*Inner Workings* 7). Lurie, our focalizer, is caught here in characteristic mode, searching for the *mot juste* and, when he has found it, turning the word around in his head for the light it might shine on his incomprehension. In regarding Africans like Petrus anthropologically—as the other to be investigated—Lurie identifies himself firmly with the culture of Europe. He explains to Petrus that his proposal to marry Lucy is not the way “we” do things (*Disgrace* 202). Lurie’s habit of thinking predominantly in terms of racial difference can also be seen in the comically grotesque stereotype of white colonialism that springs to mind amidst the horror of the attack on the farm. Locked in the toilet, unable to protect his daughter, he reflects:

He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but French and Italian will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron. (95)

Nevertheless, while the italicized word *anthropological* and the cartoon caricature of darkest Africa signal the limitations—the racialism—of Lurie’s outlook he does not turn away from Petrus in blank incomprehension. Instead he persists in his dialogue, intent on finding an answer: “he will not let go of the subject . . . he continues to nag Petrus” (118).

This essay traces a tension in the character of Lurie between two versions of Darwinism. The first version, cloaked in the disinterested pose of scientific, anthropological enquiry, soon reveals that it sees struggle and competition in racial as well as sexual and generational terms. The second version moves away from struggle to focus on the continuity of life across species, promoting a view similar to that of Charles Darwin’s seminal work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). In this book Darwin traces a flow of sympathy between humans and animals, a bond of fellow feeling manifest in the expression of humanlike emotion in animals. This emotional bond is presented as crucial to the evolutionary history and future progress of human society. One expression of emotion analyzed by Darwin is of a dog’s licking the hands and face of her master, an act of love which, he speculates, “probably originated in the females

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carefully licking their puppies—the dearest object of their love—for the sake of cleansing them” (114). He then writes of one female terrier who, having had her puppies destroyed, tried “to satisfy her instinctive maternal love by expending it on me: and her desire to lick my hands rose to an insatiable passion.” In *Disgrace* Lurie’s movement from revulsion to an acceptance of the dogs’ licking him signals his tentative approach to this second version of Darwinism. In the end he acquiesces in the licking of “his cheeks, his lips, his ears” (143), a sign that he recognizes and accepts a shared emotional life with animals (220). In moving from the first to the second version of Darwinism, Lurie sheds not only his anthropological outlook but his anthropocentric one as well.

The novel’s interest in the “anthropological” can be seen in its analysis of the category of the human, including the building blocks of human culture, such as the concept of the family, the relation of blood, kin and kind (one of Lurie’s many verbal doublets in the novel),² “my people and your people,” type and kind (she is “just your type” Lurie’s ex-wife Rosalind says of the young student Melanie Isaacs [189], whereas Melanie’s boyfriend warns Lurie to back off and “Stay with your own kind” [194]). This interest in type or kind goes together with glancing references to evolution, eugenics, blood mixing, and perfectibility, to unnatural acts and taboos, throwbacks and monsters, animal/human boundaries, the preservation of the species, and species-specific consciousness. And of course there is the anthropological interest in what is designated ironically in the very first sentence of the novel as “the problem of sex”: “For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well.”

The “anthropological” exploration of issues such as race, sex, and lineage can be seen most clearly in the novel’s focus on intraspecies struggle—the competition between individuals of the same species to see which will survive and reproduce. In *Disgrace* this struggle is interracial, intersexual, and intergenerational: black against white, men against women, parents against offspring. Furthermore, in Coetzee’s fictional world, rapid social change in South Africa entails an intensified struggle for existence for all species. All animals, human and nonhuman, are pushed hard to maintain their equilibrium in this new environment. Nonhuman animals “come nowhere” in the nation’s priorities, according to Lucy; the Animal Welfare League in Grahamstown is stripped of funding and staffed entirely by volunteers. With the dismantling of apartheid, and Land Af-

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fairs resettling Africans on their lands with the assistance of grants, white farmers like Lucy and her German neighbor Ettinger find themselves living in a more pressured, populous, and dangerous world. They have three options: adaptation to the new dispensation, migration, or extinction. Adaptation is the key concept here. In order to survive on her land Lucy must be open to change, a strength attributed to her by her friend Bev, who believes she is "adaptable" simply by virtue of being a woman (210). Lurie disagrees with Bev, bleakly concluding that if his daughter does not migrate, she "cannot last: leave her alone and in due course she will fall like rotten fruit" (205). Lurie's view of Lucy is of course colored by his own inflexibility, especially prominent at the outset of the novel, where he concedes that his temperament joins his skull as one of the "two hardest parts of the body": it is "fixed, set" (2). In comparison with her father, Lucy is adaptable, but the terms on which she must negotiate in order to survive form the controversial and troubling heart of *Disgrace*.

As a professor of literature, Lurie draws on a wide range of allusions, marshaling Shakespeare to propel his seduction of Melanie Isaacs and Flaubert to ironize his romantic and sexual longings. It is romanticism, however, that is Lurie's literary specialization, so much so that there is a mosaic of allusions to the canonical romantic poets. It is fitting that Lurie should be a romantics scholar because it was in this period that the relationship between humans and other species became topical, and even urgent.³ A key romantic intertext of *Disgrace* that has not yet been noted by critics is Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), a gloomy book that, with its focus on the specter of insufficient resources for an ever-increasing population, played a key role in the development of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). Described by Malthus himself as a work of "melancholy hue" and "dark tints" (15–16), the *Essay* opposes those, like William Godwin and the Marquis de Condorcet, who argued for the future perfectibility of man and society. The "problem of sex" invoked in the first line of Coetzee's novel lies at the heart of Malthus's disagreement with the utopians, but the "problem of sex" is also the first of two direct quotations in *Disgrace* from Thomas Hardy's great novel about human sexuality, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), a work deeply colored by Malthus's *Essay*. In his preface to the novel Hardy defines the "problem of sex" as the "deadly war waged between flesh and spirit" (23).⁴ The second quotation from Hardy occurs when Lurie starts working with Bev, putting down the dogs. He reflects:

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"The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: *because we are too menny*" (146). The words in italics invoke the suicide note ("*Done because we are too menny*" [Hardy 356; his italics]) left behind by Little Father Time after he has murdered his two half-siblings, a grotesque incident in a fictional universe dominated by the tragedy of the sexual instinct. Hardy's dark novel, together with Malthus's *Essay*, are powerful, if unnamed, presences in Coetzee's novel about post-apartheid Africa, with the words *too many* repeated often.

With Lucy pregnant by her rapists and moving closer to her newly empowered neighbor Petrus, Lurie confesses to Bev Shaw that he is not getting on well with his daughter. The problem, from Lurie's point of view, lies with "the people she lives among," especially (as Bev intuitively) with the youngest rapist Pollux, "who has moved in with Petrus" (210). Summoning the Malthusian specter behind Father Time's "*too menny*," Lurie explains to Bev:

"When I am added in, we become too many. Too many in too small a space. Like spiders in a bottle."

An image comes to him from the *Inferno*: the great marsh of Styx, with souls boiling up in it like mushrooms . . . Souls overcome with anger, gnawing at each other. (209–10)

As was the case with Malthus, Lurie's anxiety is not so much about the pressure of actual bodies as the pressure of too many people of the wrong kind—too many African consciousnesses that he simply cannot fathom from an anthropological point of view. He is also beginning to feel that just as he is being pushed out by Lucy in favor of Petrus, who acquires the sobriquet "Fatherly Petrus" (162), whites as a group will in the end have no place in the new South Africa. As a white man historically conditioned by apartheid's paranoid political arithmetic, Lurie is subject to fears of racial swamping by a "rising tide of colour" (Dubow, "The Elaboration of Segregationist Ideology" 156).⁵ Petrus already has an established family with his first wife, his second wife is pregnant, and he plans to take Lucy as a third wife, both for her safety and because she is bearing the child of his "people." With his Land Affairs grant securing "a hectare and a bit," Petrus will (Lucy predicts) get another grant in order to build a new house, enabling him to move out of the stable in which he currently lives. Lurie is suspicious:

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Petrus will not be content to plough forever his hectare and a half. Lucy may have lasted longer than her hippie, gypsy friends, but to Petrus Lucy is still chickenfeed: an amateur, an enthusiast of the farming life rather than a farmer. Petrus would like to take over Lucy's land. Then he would like to have Ettinger's too, or enough of it to run a herd on. (117)

Toward the end of the novel Lurie imagines that Petrus's new building on the eminence will "cast a long shadow" on Lucy's old farmhouse in the mornings (197), a shadow symbolic of the country's violent past and of the retribution that has begun and is sure to continue. Thus, while Malthus's dark vision was of "a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers" (72), with the latter driven by want and misery to "rapine and murder" (68), Lurie's specter is a racial one, involving competition between whites and blacks for land and for women. That both land and women are crucial to victory, and that Petrus will engross both, is suggested by the pun on *plough*.

The specter of a struggle for survival between races is also to be found in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), another important intertext for *Disgrace*. Frankenstein kills off the female mate he is making for his monster because he fears an interspecies war between his own kind (humans) and the "race of devils" his monster will propagate (114). A racial reading of Shelley's novel quickly gained currency in the nineteenth century, initiated by George Canning's speech before the House of Commons in 1824 advising caution in improving conditions for African slaves in the West Indies:

In dealing with the negro . . . we must remember that we are dealing with a being possessing the form and strength of a man, but the intellect only of a child. To turn him loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance. (qtd. in Barbour 45)

Canning's description of the negro slave is important for understanding Lurie's characterization of the rapist Pollux, a young man who seems to be a child but is not. For Lurie, Pollux is a "violent child in the body of a young man . . . like a jackal sniffing around." To Lucy he says: "In the old

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days we had a word for people like him. Deficient. Mentally deficient. Morally deficient” (207–08). Racist notions that adult Africans are arrested developmentally—that they are children—have a long history in proslavery discourse, and they crop up pervasively in apartheid ideology.⁶ While Lurie reveals himself as captive to these views, Lucy resolutely rejects them, arguing instead that Pollux is a “disturbed child.” In countering her father’s views, Lucy “faces him squarely, squinting into the sunlight,” and the conversation ends with her father packing his bags (208). Lucy’s position here is consistent with her earlier rejection of her father’s exclusive focus on race and economics as the reason for her rape. Where Lurie sees her plight as one of “slavery,” she prefers the sexualized terms “Subjection. Subjugation” (159). Furthermore, in turning the discussion of what happened to her away from race to “men and sex,” she implicates her father in the rape:

“Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn’t it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood—doesn’t it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?”

You are a man, you ought to know: does one speak to one’s father like that? Are she and he on the same side? (158–59).⁷

Lurie’s concept of a conflict between different sides is racially inflected: symbolically, the rape signals for him a transference of supremacy from one side to another. His and Lucy’s “side” is the blood tie between father and daughter, and racially that tie is whiteness. Shocked, affronted at the abyss that appears to open up in this conversation, Lurie nevertheless soon concedes that his daughter’s intuition had been right after all: “he does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself” (160). As the word *ghost* suggests, however, there are bounds to Lurie’s ability to think himself into the minds of the rapists, for the act of sympathetic imagination cannot be abstract but embodied.⁸ These limitations later lead to his typecasting of Pollux as the conflated negro slave and monster of Canning’s landmark speech.

The tension in Lurie between abstraction and embodiment can be

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aligned with the tension between the two versions of Darwinism outlined earlier. At the start of the novel, in his relationship with the prostitute Soraya, we see Lurie's tendency to abstraction; like the copulation of snakes, his lovemaking is "lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest" (3). Later, when he rings Soraya at home, he is surprised by her shrillness; in self-defence his response is abstractly intellectual, mentally correcting her grammar. Only when he reflects bodily, in animal terms, does he see his action in a new light: "But then, what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen's nest, into the home of her cubs?" (10). Similar tensions can be seen in his views of parenting. Early on in the novel he admits to Lucy that he "can't help feeling that, by comparison with being a mother, being a father is a rather abstract business" (63). This is borne out by his failure to understand why Lucy rejects the option of an abortion. Lucy meets her father's incomprehension with maternal instinct: "I am a woman, David. Do you think I hate children? Should I choose against the child because of who its father is?" (198). Gradually Lurie comes to terms with the unborn child, imagining himself as a grandfather who, taking lessons from Victor Hugo, the "poet of grandfatherhood," will eventually cultivate "the virtues of the old: equanimity, kindness, patience" (217). Again, because the price of Lucy's decision to switch allegiance from him seems so high, Lurie fails at first to understand the adaptive mechanism moving his daughter closer in under the protective wing of Father Petrus. By the end of the novel, however, Lurie has begun to understand in more concrete terms how it is in Lucy's self-interest to join the dominant group. In all these instances we see Lurie moving from abstraction to embodiment—from an egoistic outlook that sees only struggle and competition to one that surrenders this worldview to a new valuing of alterity.

Mary Shelley knew Malthus's work well, not least because he was engaged in a very public exchange with her father William Godwin, whose theory of perfectibility he questioned. There is a romantic dialectic in Coetzee's novel between a Malthusian population principle and a Godwinian drive of the species to perfect itself, a tension caught movingly by the "too many" dogs and the perfect "solution" to this populousness in their extermination. That *Disgrace* is concerned with species, and with the role that Malthusianism plays in Darwinian evolutionism, can be seen in the comedy of Lurie's belief that his trial at Cape Technical University was for performing

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unnatural acts: for broadcasting old seed, tired seed, seed that does not quicken, *contra naturam*. If the old men hog the young women, what will be the future of the species . . . Half of literature is about it: young women struggling to escape from under the weight of old men, for the sake of the species. (190)

Nevertheless, unrepentant, incorrigible, Lurie continues to pursue Melanie, attending the play in which she is performing. When warned off by her boyfriend to stay with his "own kind," Lurie rejects the idea outright with a classic Latin declarative sentence that appears to celebrate the sexual drive as a force propelling the utmost strangers into one another's arms: "*Omnis gens quaecumque se in se perficere vult*. The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman's body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven" (194).

Such biological perfectibilism is precisely what Malthus opposed in contemporaries like Godwin who were optimistic enough to believe in the inevitability of individual and social progress. For Malthus, excess population was the chief obstacle lying in the way of such perfectibility. Curiously, the novel's translation of this Latin sentence is very loose, not much more than a gloss. Literally the Latin sentence reads: "every race (or nation) wishes to bring itself to perfection in itself," or "every race wishes to realize the ideal concept that it has of itself." In the context of apartheid, this literal translation has a sinister edge to it, suggestive of the ideology of "separate development"—that is, all races should have the chance to realize their racial genius. But whatever belief Lurie might have had in the upward-only momentum of evolution is arrested once he learns of Lucy's pregnancy. Instead of perfectibility, the child of Lucy's rape—his kin—represents a monstrous and mixed (racially miscegenated) form:

The gang of three. Three fathers in one . . . They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs, bulging with seed aching to perfect itself. And now, lo and behold, *the child!* . . . What kind of child can seed like that give life to? (199)

In a parody of the holy trinity, the gang of three demonstrates the meaning of the survival of the fittest. They show Lurie that in competitive, evolutionary terms, black seed prevails over white, youth over age.

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In his bitter reflections on his daughter's pregnancy, Lurie swings between rage and self-pity. He is enraged that through rape—the “god of chaos and mixture” (105)—a weed “has been allowed to tangle his roots with Lucy and Lucy's existence” (209). But which weed? While the simpleton Pollux has “a flat expressionless face and piggish eyes,” another of the rapists is “handsome, strikingly handsome, with a high forehead, sculpted cheekbones, wide, flaring nostrils” (92). There is no natural selection according to beauty. While Lurie appears to think of Pollux as the child's father, there can be no certainty, only randomness; the “survival of the fittest” is not in any sense guaranteed. From rage Lurie moves to self-pity that he should have sired only a daughter: “A father without the sense to have a son: is this how it is all going to end, is this how his line is going to run out, like water dribbling into the earth?” (199). The imagined extinction of his line puts Lurie in the same doomed category as Ettinger, who defends his heavily fortified land with guns and dogs. His only son has returned to Germany, and it is only a matter of time before he dies or, as Lucy predicts, ends up with a bullet in his back. Lurie reflects: “In that respect Ettinger had been stupid. A good peasant takes care to have lots of sons” (118). Petrus, on the other hand, shows what a “good peasant” he is by his decided preference for sons over daughters (130).

Having no son is just one expression of Lurie's increasing marginalization. Once a traditional humanities professor, teaching literature and modern languages, he has been rationalized and restructured by his university into a professor of communications. Clearly he belongs to a threatened species, regarded by his department head as a “hangover from the past,” a “moral dinosaur” (89), a relic in the system who writes books about dead people. Furthermore, his students do not care much about poetry. For instance, Melanie Isaacs's tastes are more contemporary and feminist, centered on women's writing: Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker. She and her classmates do not warm to Wordsworth or to any of the great male poets. Inevitably they miss all the literary allusions. The three gods of Lurie's epic pantheon—the (un)holy trinity of Byron, Lucifer, and Cain—are promiscuously scrambled into one chaotic mix: “Heads bent, they scribble down his words, Byron, Lucifer, Cain, it is all the same to them” (34). His students are, Lurie reflects ruefully, “post everything”: “PostChristian, posthistorical, postliterate” (89). Regarding them as some new alien species, he adds, “they might as well have been

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hatched from eggs yesterday" (32). With no cultural legacy to transmit to this generation of students, Lurie is like the rare and endangered cycads his daughter cultivates from seed. He is a living fossil, an evolutionary dead end. It is only in the course of the novel, when he begins to surrender his general vision of life as a struggle to survive and reproduce, that he can free himself from individual anxiety about evolutionary and reproductive failure.

And what about Lucy? In shock immediately after the attack, Lurie gropes for an explanation of what has happened to them. On account of the "too many" principle, there is risk, he thinks, in owning anything: "a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things" (98). What he and Lucy have suffered is a simple "re-distribution of goods." That is the comforting theory anyway: "Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant . . . Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them." The answer to the question about women's "niche"—the place women must construct in order to adapt to a dynamic evolutionary system—is a bleak one, summed up in Lucy's decision to remain silent about the rape and allow herself to be stripped of everything she has built up on the farm. Her silence about the rape persists as one of the novel's most disturbing and challenging features.⁹ For in remaining silent, in warning Lurie that *her* story is not *his* story to tell, she runs the risk of conferring ownership of the story on her rapists. At least this is how Lurie sees it. With Lucy silenced by the shame and disgrace she feels, the rapists now own her story, telling it exclusively from their point of view, their victim's lesbianism possibly adding extra piquancy: "How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman is for" (115). For Lurie, the pregnant Lucy's place—her niche—amounts to a very pessimistic view of the racial, sexual, and social compact evolving in the new South Africa.

Before Lucy's rape Lurie moved in an intellectual world of high literary culture. His imaginative domain is one of classical myth and learning, peopled with gods and angels and heroes and devils. His cosmography is Dantean or Miltonic, with heaven and hell, Eden and an underworld. Strictly hierarchical in his thinking, at one point he describes Lucy in evolutionary terms as a "throwback" (61). Turning her back on the intellectual, city circles of her parents, Lucy has opted for an alternative

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“hippy” life on the land growing flowers and vegetables. That her name recalls the three-and-a-half-million-year-old hominid Lucy, discovered in the Serengeti region of east Africa in 1974, is jokingly suggested in the scene where, idly fondling his daughter’s foot, Lurie reflects “Good bones, like her mother” (76). But she is also, of course, Wordsworth’s enigmatic Lucy Gray, a ghostly child of nature who disappears on a stormy night leaving no trace except her footprints in the snow. Wordsworth’s Lucy is a border figure, less a creature of flesh and blood than the personification of human solitude, ordered out into the cold night by her father with no guide to assist her.¹⁰ To the extent that Wordsworth’s ballad is a tale of narrative estrangement, this fits well with Lurie’s frequent misreading of his daughter’s life and his inability to guide her. For instance, when he first comes to stay with her after his disgrace, she senses that he wishes she were learning Russian or painting, leading a higher life. Against this she argues that there is no higher life: “This is the only life we have. Which we share with animals” (74). Lurie agrees that “this is the only life there is,” but he cannot accept the proposition that humans and animals are the same or in any way equal. By all means let us be kind to them, he says, but let us not lose perspective: “We are of a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different.” Despite the disclaimer, “different” does, of course, mean “higher” in Lurie’s mind.

After Lucy’s rape, high romantic conceptions of art and literature lose their authority, as can be seen in the mismatch between the representation of rape and its reality. A memory from childhood comes to Lurie:

In an art-book in the library there was a painting called *The Rape of the Sabine Women*: men on horseback in skimpy Roman armor, women in gauze veils flinging their arms in the air and wailing. What had all this attitudinizing to do with what he suspected rape to be: the man lying on top of the woman and pushing himself into her. (160)

The rape of the Sabine women is nevertheless a highly suggestive inter-text, not least because of its story of two different “gens” (races, nations) warring over the reproductive bodies of women. Fearful of extinction, of their new settlement failing, the Romans seized upon the Sabine women because the Sabine fathers were prohibiting intermarriage. After their abduction, the Sabine women remained with their Roman husbands as loyal wives and peacemakers between the two sides. As we have already

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seen, in the competition between her father Lurie and her “husband” Petrus, Lucy chooses the husband. To her father she says:

“I must have peace around me. I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace.”

“And I am part of what you are prepared to sacrifice?”

She shrugs. “I didn’t say it, you said it.”

“Then I’ll pack my bags.” (208)

Memories of childhood, such as the painting seen in an art book, do not feature prominently in Lurie’s consciousness, but the Wordsworthian tag “The child is father of the man” maps well onto the novel’s many historical inversions as white overlordship totters and the existing racial world gets turned upside down. If Lurie thinks of Lucy as a throwback, a leftover from some earlier evolutionary state, Petrus thinks of her as a “forward-looking lady, not backward looking” (136). If Petrus as husband is chosen over Lurie, he also usurps Lurie as a father. At the end of the novel Lurie has shape-shifted into the dog-man, the role Petrus once played. Now Petrus holds the descriptor *dog-man* in derision, along with the racist word *boy* used by some whites to refer to adult black men.¹¹ After the rape Petrus hones his skills of mimicry, doublespeak, and obfuscation. When he describes himself as just an unskilled laborer, “a boy,” Lurie thinks: “Petrus speaks the word with real amusement. Once he was a boy, now he is no longer. Now he can play at being one, as Marie Antoinette could play at being a milkmaid” (152).

For Lurie the bonds of kin—“my” people as opposed to “your” people¹²—are troubled by Lucy’s decision to move toward Petrus for protection. The betrayal is more than personal, however; it is also a betrayal of one’s race and class, for in switching allegiance Lucy moves from being Petrus’s equal to becoming his “bywoner,” a poor and propertyless Afrikaner (204). That his daughter should descend so far, thus risking her whiteness, fulfils the worst fears of the architects of apartheid, focused as they were on the problems arising out of poor whiteism.¹³ But in terms of the estrangement between father and daughter, the blurring of Lucy’s racial and class identity does not present as large an obstacle as that of their gender difference. Lucy and her friend Bev Shaw tell Lurie firmly that he can only ever be an outsider to the rape; he cannot understand what happened that afternoon: “You weren’t there. You don’t know what happened” (140). Lurie’s determination to own the terrible story of what

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happened can be seen in his imaginative re-creation of it for Lucy. That he is narrating it successfully can be seen in his daughter's whispered "And?" encouraging him to continue. The plot is marred, however, by his intrusion as narrator: "And I did nothing. I did not save you," a self-obsessed comment summarily dismissed by Lucy with "an impatient little flick of the hand" (157–58). As she later says to her father: "You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am the minor character" (198).

Ownership is a key issue in Lurie's relationship with women in the novel. It irks him that Discreet Escorts should get half of what he pays Soraya for each visit, a reminder of the fact that the agency owns "this part" of Soraya, the sex "function." That he himself would like to own more of her, on his terms and no one else's, is clear in his toying with the idea "of asking her to see him in her own time. He would like to spend an evening with her, perhaps even a whole night" (2). Ownership is also an issue in his seduction of the student Melanie. The first lesson he teaches her at the start of his campaign is that she does not have exclusive ownership of herself. A woman's beauty, he tells her, "does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it" (16). Failing to convince her to spend the night with him, he dubs her "beauty's rose" and quotes the first two lines of the first poem of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence: "From fairest creatures we desire increase, That thereby beauty's rose might never die" (*Disgrace* 16). Elsewhere Coetzee has described these lines as both "Darwinian" and "Roman" in their imperative "that the finest representatives of the species owe a higher duty to their kind to mate" (*Stranger Shores* 32–33). Unsurprisingly, quoting these lines to Melanie falls well short of the mark:

Not a good move [Lurie reflects]. Her smile loses its playful, mobile quality. The pentameter, whose cadence once served so well to oil the serpent's words, now only estranges. He has become a . . . guardian of the culture hoard. She puts down her cup. "I must leave. I am expected." (16)

Instead of possessing the serpent's winning tongue, amazing Eve with "Language of Man pronounced / By tongue of brute, and human sense expressed" (Milton 383), the aging libertine mars his design with oddly inappropriate lines about the dynastic obligation to produce heirs, summed up in the command from Genesis to increase and multiply. But

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while the word *increase* conjures up images of reproduction and lineage, it calls up as a rhyme not *decrease* but *decease*, an abrupt foiling of expectations, as noted by many Shakespearean scholars:¹⁴

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty’s rose might never die.
But as the ripper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory. (Shakespeare 41)

Lurie’s subsequent pessimism about his lineage after the rape of Lucy is prefigured here in the oddity of that pairing “increase” / “decease.”

We do not see Lurie teaching Shakespeare or Milton but Wordsworth and Byron. The Byron poem he sets for study is *Lara, A Tale* (1814), one of the many intertexts for Byron’s ghost story competition of 1816 and hence for the origins of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Lara is a typical Byronic hero, a mysterious, gloomy, haughty outcast with the stamp of Cain on his forehead. Returning to his ancestral home after a very long absence, he appears to harbor some nameless, unspeakable secret or crime. His countrymen ask: “What had he been? What was he, this unknown, / Who walked their world, his lineage only known.” The lines Lurie analyzes with his students are these:

He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurled;
A thing of dark imaginings, that shaped
By choice the perils he by chance escaped (251)

Lara is here the archangel Lucifer, flung out from heaven for his rebellion. As a result of this disgrace—this fall from higher to lower—Lara is downgraded to a thing, a monster. This does not deter Lurie from being drawn to the glamorous figure of this dark angel, as well as to his “mad, bad, and dangerous to know” creator, Lord Byron. As he explains to his students, throughout his writing career Byron “found himself conflated with his own poetic creations—with Harold, Manfred, even Don Juan” (31). Lurie is drawn to the satanic; he identifies with it. If he were to choose a totem it would be the snake. He has even made an academic study of the origins of the Faust legend. At the conclusion of his class on *Lara* he urges his students to see that, rather than condemn the hero as a being “with whom there is something constitutionally wrong,” Byron invites us to “understand and sympathize” with him. But he warns, “there is

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a limit to sympathy. For though he lives among us, he is not one of us. He is exactly what he calls himself: a *thing*, that is, a monster. Finally, Byron will suggest, it will not be possible to love him, not in the deeper, more human sense of the word. He will be condemned to solitude" (33–34).

Lurie appeals here to a human species-specific consciousness.¹⁵ Lara is not human, "not one of us," but a thing. In words that look forward to his first exchange with Lucy concerning the status of animals, Lurie instructs his students that it is right to be kind and sympathetic to "things" (downgraded humans), but in the end they belong to a different (inferior) order of creation. Things are monsters, beyond the pale of human love. Ironically, by the end of the novel, Lurie has himself become a thing, a monster, for a monster is what a dog-man is. "[H]ow are the mighty fallen," murmurs Melanie's father (167). But in the process of "becoming dog" Lurie manages to jettison his species-specific conception of love. Every dog he is about to kill with Bev's assistance is now given "what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love" (219). The injustice inflicted on dogs that Lucy had earlier identified—"They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things" (78)—is rectified at the point of death, on the operating table of Bev's clinic. By the novel's conclusion, Lurie has shaken himself free of the many questions associated with species-specific consciousness, questions such as: "Is it proper to mourn the death of beings who do not practise mourning amongst themselves?" (127). Or "what do dogs know of honour and dishonour anyway?" (146). In the end Lurie takes it upon himself to convey the dead dogs into the incinerator, not because it makes any difference to Bev or to the animals themselves. Instead he does it "For himself . . . For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing." The dogs' anonymous deaths recall the death of Wordsworth's Lucy, a death that passes unnoticed except for its effect on the one left mourning:

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and oh,
The difference to me! (150)

Lurie's gallantry, his "saving the honour" of canine corpses may conform to his idea of a more perfect world but it is also (he has to admit) "stupid, daft, wrongheaded" (146). Nevertheless he does it, on account of his "idea

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of the world." Now that he allows the doomed dogs to lick him, he has evolved from a "moral dinosaur" to a niche uneasily suspended between wrongheadedness and honor.

Frankenstein's monster, a creature of mixed, indeterminate species, presents us with the moving spectacle of a creature driven to trace out some kind of lineage for himself. After finding a satchel of books and teaching himself to read, instead of finding enlightenment he becomes even more bewildered about what and who he is:

I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read. . . . My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them.

(86)

Milton's *Paradise Lost* takes him no closer to solving the riddle:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from, beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.

(87)

As the monster turns these questions around in his head, he draws on his literary education to interrogate what it means to be human. In doing so he shows us how the category of the human is a work of ongoing discursive construction. His arrival at this point of understanding marks, however, the limit of his literary education. For all his persuasive eloquence, the monster cannot, in the end, entice his creator's sympathy to cross the species barrier. Frankenstein refuses to admit his creature to the ranks of the human.

At the end of *Disgrace* Lurie differs from Frankenstein in recognizing, as Darwin did, the evolutionary and emotional continuity between human and nonhuman species. Whereas once Lurie had sided with the an-

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cients in their belief that, unlike humans, animals “don’t have proper souls” (78), he now accepts the animality of human life. The precise causes of this change of heart are hard to fathom, but for the most part they occur after the rape, when issues of the destiny of women (their “niche”) come to a head in Lucy’s surrender of everything to Petrus. Starting again at “ground level,” from a position of complete humiliation, she agrees with her father that she has become “like a dog”: “With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (204–05). The convergence between the lives of women and those of animals in *Disgrace* can be seen in Lurie’s uneasiness at the two young sheep who are to be slaughtered for Petrus’s party. He reflects: “Sheep do not own themselves, do not own their lives. They exist to be used, every last ounce of them, their flesh to be eaten, their bones to be crushed and fed to poultry” (123). A consideration of the fate of animals causes Lurie to shift somewhat from his patriarchal and proprietorial attitude to women. His destructive fury at Lucy’s rape lessens, and in the end he steps back to allow his daughter to emerge as the main character in her own story. To the earlier question, “what kind of child” could issue from such seed, Lurie now answers that the baby will not be a monster: instead it will be “just as solid, just as long-lasting” as its mother, and so it will go on, “a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten” (217). Here the competitive need for his own line to survive has opened out into a Shakespearean perspective; Lucy’s increase will inevitably entail the grandfather’s decease.

Lurie’s development and, in particular, his movement toward a Darwinist outlook less focused on struggle and more on human–animal continuity, is significantly shaped by his experience with Bev, who, in championing the ways of animals, exposes the Malthusian arithmetic as applicable only to humans:

“The trouble is, there are just too many of them,” says Bev Shaw. “They don’t understand it, of course, and we have no way of telling them. Too many by our standards, not by theirs. They would just multiply and multiply if they had their way, until they filled the earth. They don’t think it’s a bad thing to have lots of offspring. The more the jollier.” (85)

Lurie notes the dogs’ egalitarianism—“No one too high and mighty to smell another’s backside”—and their general peacefulness: “He is watching the dogs eat. It surprises him how little fighting there is. The small, the

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weak hold back, accepting their lot, waiting their turn" (84–85). Nevertheless, for all that Lurie can see the irrelevance of Malthusian thinking when applied to animals, an ineradicable and systemic anthropocentrism prevails. Measured by human standards, the unwanted dogs are "too many" and must be eliminated. Incinerating the dead dogs respectfully constitutes a part of Lurie's atonement for this anthropocentric logic. He becomes the dogs' servant, a *harijan*—an untouchable, the lowest of the low. In honoring the dogs who know nothing of honor and dishonor, Lurie acknowledges the evolutionary kinship between human and non-human species.

Near the start of the novel Lurie tells Melanie that Wordsworth has been one of his "masters" (13). This reveals many things about Lurie, not least the belief he shares with Wordsworth that poetry is the defining discourse of the human species. Wordsworth's poet typifies his kind, he is "a man speaking to men" using a common language, shared by all. After the rape, after continuing "to nag Petrus," after fathoming Lucy's behavior, and after helping Bev "liberate" the unwanted dogs, Lurie has become somewhat cynical about poetry: "So much for the poets, so much for the dead masters. Who have not, he must say, guided him well. *Aliter*, to whom he has not listened well" (179). Moreover, any belief in the distinctively human nature of literature, music, and art has disappeared. Theresa's passion for Byron keeps her "howling to the moon for the rest of her natural life" (186) while the crippled dog who keeps Lurie company smacks its lips and seems on the point of singing too, or howling (215). In the contrapuntal music of Lurie's comic opera, the species-specific consciousness of the human kind is nowhere in sight.

Notes

1. For Coetzee on the mischievous play of authors when it comes to similarities between themselves and the people in their books, see *Inner Workings* 147–48.
2. For more such verbal doublets see Derek Attridge.
3. See Christine Kenyon-Jones.
4. In this preface Hardy also refers to the "fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity" (23).
5. For more on the power of numbers, statistics, and social measurement in apartheid South Africa, see Deborah Posel.

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6. See Coetzee, "The Mind of Apartheid" 15.

7. See Rosemary Jolly.

8. For a discussion of the sympathetic imagination, see Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* 35.

9. A clue to her silence might be found in Coetzee's essay on Breyten Breytenbach's memoir *Dog Heart*, where he criticizes the book for circulating horror stories of attacks on whites, a mechanism "that drives white paranoia about being chased off the land and ultimately into the sea" (*Stranger Shores* 312).

10. The lantern her father gives her is not for her sake but for her mother's:

To-night will be a stormy night,
You to the Town must go,
And take a lantern, Child, to light
Your Mother thro the snow. (Wordsworth 156)

For a reading of *Disgrace* in relation to the Lucy poems, see Margot Beard.

11. Ettinger says he will send over "a boy" to fix the Combi (109).

12. Elsewhere Coetzee has spoken of how the term *people* is "too loaded" for use today, especially in the context of Afrikaner racial identity (*Stranger Shores* 311).

13. For poor whites and fears of racial degeneration see Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, and Susanne Klausen.

14. Helen Vendler argues that "we expect, by parallel with *increase*, the milder *decrease*" (46).

15. For a fascinating book on the link between romantic concepts of poetry and theorizations of the human, see Maureen N. McLane.

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Reviews

Beyond Posthuman

Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems

by Bruce Clarke

New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. 242 pages

Colin Milburn

The posthuman evolves—virtually by definition. Transformations, modifications, and processes of becoming are vital functions for many diverse species of posthumanist discourse that try to imagine the beyond of man and humanism. We could, for example, point to innumerable Darwinian speculations on the future of *Homo sapiens* and the extent to which the human organism might dramatically alter over time (the biological posthuman). Or we could recall the many cybernetic visions of humans and machines linked ever more closely in the integrated circuits of global communication networks: robots, androids, cyborgs (the technological posthuman). Likewise, we could attend to those forms of critical theory that, in discovering the so-called human subject to be nothing but the constructed product of sociodiscursive forces, have adopted a notoriously apocalyptic tone, seeing the human as a cultural figure rapidly approaching its end (the social posthuman). These different registers of the posthuman—biological, technological, and social—have generated rich genealogies of scientific extrapolation, fictive representation, and scholarly commentary, with different lineages intermixing and cross-breeding in fascinating ways. Today there seems to be no end to the various ends of man dreamed by our technoculture, no end to narratives of the keenly anticipated posthuman and all its transformative potential.

As Bruce Clarke observes in this stunning new book, such stories of the coming posthuman ultimately register the radically *nonhuman* environments that form the everyday conditions for the biological, technological, and social maintenance of what we would otherwise call the human. That is, rather than representing possibilities for the evolutionary future of the human, posthuman narratives show us that we have never

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been human at all—or at least not only human. By comprehending the various posthuman species that populate our quotidian fictions as products of self-referential systems operating at higher orders of organizational complexity—narratives of biological, technological, or social metamorphoses as recursive allegories of the contingent systems that give them form—we obtain a perspective on the world that accounts for our own embodied anthropocentric viewpoints, enabling us to see otherwise: what Clarke describes as, finally, a “notion of the posthuman worth the name” (195).

Thus representing a major metamutation in the gene pool of post-humanist discourse, Clarke’s book ambitiously synthesizes neocybernetic systems theory with narratology, joining the two fields by focusing critically on the figure of the posthuman metamorph in all its guises. Lest we be tempted to think of the posthuman as something shockingly new, Clarke reminds us that narratives of posthuman metamorphosis have existed since archaic times. Attending to the transhistorical operation of these narratives in the maintenance of meaning systems (social, psychic, and otherwise) is therefore crucial for comprehending the place of the human in the world, for gaining a “more precise appreciation for our evolutionary situation and for the actual complexity of our systemic situatedness” (4). Adapting Bruno Latour’s concept of the nonmodern to designate the variable-ontology condition given by the intrinsic intermingling of natures/cultures, Clarke argues that the persistence of metamorphic narratives communicates the fundamental involvement of the nonhuman in the production of the human, the coupling of the human with its environment, such that

classical human persons—the extraenvironmental essences of selves, souls maintained by ideal bodily stabilities—become at once nonmodern and posthumanist, relativized actors performing operational functions and metamorphic transformations within natural/social networks and systems. (53)

By merging the insights of neocybernetics with narrative formalism, Clarke attempts to demonstrate that fictions of metamorphosis actively mediate the relation of the human to the infrahuman and ultrahuman systems that produce it.

Neocybernetics, in Clarke’s account, comprises the social systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, the biological autopoeisis concept of Hum-

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berto Maturana and Francisco Varela, and the second-order cybernetics ("cybernetics of cybernetics") of Heinz von Foerster, among others. These neocybernetic theories have moved beyond the limitations of the first generation of cybernetic information theory (associated with researchers such as Norbert Wiener, W. Ross Ashby, Claude Shannon, Warren McCulloch, and John von Neumann), especially its focus on feedback control of the signal-to-noise ratio in communication systems. Instead, second-order neocybernetics attends to information as emergent from interactions with its own environment—in other words, "noise" and "medium" matter—and recognizes that any observation is itself involved in the self-organizing dynamics of that observing system. Clarke unfolds the principal notions of neocybernetics through careful readings of several literary texts, from the well known (Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) to the less familiar (Damon Knight's *Beyond the Barrier*), as part of his focused effort to revamp the field of narratology through a neocybernetic idiom. Even as it quickly accelerates into theoretical overdrive, Clarke's book serves as an accessible overview of the complexities of second-order systems theories for beginners and adepts alike, as well as a critical translation of these concepts for the discipline of literary studies.

Translation is arguably the operational core of the book, as well as its primary motif. As Clarke's scholarship has often emphasized, beginning with his *Allegories of Writing: The Subject of Metamorphosis*, the material practice of translation always functions as an engine of epistemic metamorphosis. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Peter Quince famously draws attention to the metamorphic function of translation upon observing Bottom becoming ass: "Bottom! bless thee! thou art translated." However modest and reversible the act of translation might at first appear, it is never as modest or as reversible as it pretends. Thus Clarke's project to upgrade the field of narratology by translating it into the language of neocybernetics—variously presented as a "[r]edescription of mainstream narrative theory . . . through second-order systems concepts" (7) and a "productive alignment of narratological with systems-theoretical distinctions" (31)—is necessarily more than redescription, more than alignment of two equivalent vocabularies. For Clarke's neocybernetic translation entails a wholesale transmutation of the premises and the consequences of the formal study of narrative.

This transmutation is necessary, Clarke argues, because classical narratology has reached an evolutionary dead end, foreclosed by its own humanist limitations:

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What holds [narratology] back, it seems to me, is a common stock of humanist tropes (“the life of the text,” “universal masterplots,” etc.), and also, the maintenance of an undertheorized representationalist orientation that elides the systemic nature of the processes involved and takes the operational contingencies of cognitive and communicative productions for granted. The productions of autopoietic observing systems involved in any narrative phenomenon are not representations or mere decodings of received transmissions—they are system-specific reconstructions.

(33)

Accordingly, the metamorphosis of classical narratology into neocybernetic narratology enables us to observe narrative as such as an essential function of the maintenance of social systems. Through critical interpretations of several narratives of “alien communication” (H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*, and Carl Sagan’s *Contact*), Clarke shows that the perspective of a properly neocybernetic narratology reveals how the literary text reports on its own systemic conditions of emergence, the conditions of its narratability, and hence the structuration of its own readership—namely, us:

The narrative question for alien communication, “looking for partners,” is an allegory of posthuman systemic merger. Meanwhile, right here, in our bodies and our thoughts, we *are* being watched and manipulated. Without our awareness, social systems virtually invade our bodies and minds. They focalize us, producing inhuman narrations that contain us. We are the environmental references maintaining the self-reference of social systems binding individuals by the mediatic threads of communicative events.

(42)

Thus translating narratology into the terms of neocybernetics remakes fiction into an essential medium of social self-organization, recording its own relation to the processes of systemic differentiation and change. Translation reenters the form of evolution. *Posthuman Metamorphosis* itself likewise evolves from its primary agenda of renovating narrative theory and ends up, by internally translating its new theoretical perspective into critical practice, articulating the conditional possibility for a posthuman viability: namely, a robust and critically sophisticated posthuman theory that accounts for, and transforms through, the all-too-humanist perspec-

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tives that have dogged most species of posthumanism to date. Indeed, what is partly at stake in Clarke's book is a defense of second-order systems theory against prevailing critiques of the recalcitrant humanism that characterized first-order cybernetics, particularly in its "disembodiment" of information (that is, its conceptual severance of materiality from informatic pattern). As several scholars in literature and science studies have shown (though the touchstone for this argument remains N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*), the disembodiment of information associated with early informatics and feedback-control theory—as well as later discourses of cyberspace and cyberpunk—has persistently reinscribed metaphysical dualisms of mind/body, form/matter, and subject/object onto cybernetic and computational forms of posthumanism.

However, in passing through meticulous consideration of formal narrative devices—character-bound perspectivalism, diegetic frames, narrative embedding, and so forth—and examining their functions in literary texts such as Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Stanislaw Lem's *The Cyberiad*, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, and many others, Clarke argues that neocybernetics makes no untenable severance of information from matter, content from form, but rather fundamentally depends on the feedback of the medium of communication into the very act of communication. Among the many rock-and-roll moments of *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, the chapter demonstrating the constant feedback of medium into message in *The Fly* saga is, to my mind, the head-banging metal concert blasting ecstatic shockwaves throughout the whole book. Clarke documents how the sequels and remakes that constitute the literary/cinematic mythos of *The Fly* constantly relay first-order cybernetic models of signal transmission in their plots, narrating the separability of information from matter, signal from noise, with all the moral and metaphysical associations traditionally animated by these divisions. But Clarke then points out that at exactly the same time, *The Fly* stories constantly rely on self-reference to their own structures of narrative form and medial instantiation, even to the extent that these moments of self-reference discretely guide the plotlines of teleportation and posthuman transformation (man becoming fly, and beyond). *The Fly* saga thereby deconstructs its own humanist, first-order cybernetic vision and opens inside itself a second-order systems perspective—a fully posthumanistic, constructivist epistemology that emerges only reflexively, in real time, or as Clarke cleverly puts it early in

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the book, “on the fly”: “The only ground for epistemology is one that is constructed on the fly at the location of, and from moment to moment by, the present operations of observing systems as they observe each other observing” (6).

The elegantly recursive critical strategy that Clarke develops on the fly then sets up his concluding analysis of the career of Octavia Butler. He proposes that Butler’s novels of posthuman possibility embrace neo-cybernetic forms of thought, and they therefore enact a viable mode of posthumanism that attends to the systemic situatedness of the human in the world. He documents how Butler’s texts, ranging from her early *Kindred* to her final novel, *Fledgling*, resonate with the biological writings of Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan on symbiogenesis (the evolutionary process whereby two different organisms merge together as a single living system), and he wraps up his book by reading Butler’s science fiction narratives as symbiogenetic models for an ecologically sensitive, scientifically savvy, philosophically attuned posthumanism that sees “the human metamorphosed by reconnection to the worldly and systemic conditions of its evolutionary possibility” (196).

Biological autopoiesis and social systems theories are certainly not without their critics. But Clarke’s book goes a long way to addressing many of the most contentious issues (for example, those surrounding the concepts of closure and cognition), and even clearing up certain common misunderstandings about systems-theoretical terminology (for example, spending some time to clarify the notion of reentry, the precise meaning of operational closure as opposed to other forms of closure, and so forth). Yet more importantly, Clarke’s wide-ranging and vibrant writing indicates how transformative and productive neocybernetic models can be for literary theory, offering a striking new way of studying the formal and social functions of narrative at the level of literary texts and the level of cultural practices. Just as various other theoretical models borrowed from fields initially external to literary studies—psychoanalysis, Marxism, chaos theory, phenomenology, and so forth—have proved and continue to prove enormously valuable for stimulating innovation in the study of literature, neocybernetic modes of analysis can help us see what we have not seen before when we look at stories, actively accounting for the blind spots produced by any act of observation or analysis by folding them back into the very process of reading itself. Through the symbiogenesis of diverse disciplinary methods, as Clarke stylishly shows in *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, we come to read differently. And thus, as readers, we evolve.

Modernity, Information, and the Management of Life

The Emergence of Genetic Rationality: Space, Time, and Information in American Biological Science, 1870–1920

by Phillip Thurtle

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. 381 pages

Justus Nieland

Thurtle's ambitious and far-ranging study seeks to rethink modern genetics—not as a series of laboratory breakthroughs (Mendel's peas, Morgan's mutant fruit flies), but as a "science of record keeping," or better, a mode of "information processing" enabled by the material transformations and technologies of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernity (3). Rather than explore the specific record-keeping practices of modern genetic pioneers, Thurtle situates his study in the "period before many of the key experiments in classical genetics" to show how "cultural presuppositions and changes in the way that information was processed helped make thinking in terms of genetics possible" (15). Modern genetics, he argues, was the product of a broader, atomized "space of flows" of turn-of-the-century modernity, "one among many products of a logic of exchange (rather than possession)" in which human life was increasingly thought through abstract "unit characters" rather than heroic actors embedded in local space (288).

What Thurtle calls genetic rationality, a concept of heredity based on heritable traits, is variously shaped by modernity's "new forms of informational practices such as vertical files, standardized forms, and middle managers" (4); by the "clerical divisions of labor" attending the rise of the professional middle class; and by the "rationalized communication and transportation practices of the era" (9)—for example, the storied annihilation of space by time produced by the railroad. In these ways, genetic rationality is fueled by the "large-scale growth of managerial capitalism" in the late nineteenth century, whose forms of record keeping were also, Thurtle provocatively argues, ways of rethinking biological organisms' relationships to the "novel experiences of space and time" characteristic

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of modernity (10). Also placing the human organism in new, modern folds of time and space were turn-of-the-century narratives (Jack London's naturalist fiction is Thurtle's most reliable literary example) that generated knowledge about heredity before the dawn of laboratory genetics proper.

Thurtle successfully explores genetic rationality as a way of thinking the shifting space-times of individual human life—changes symptomatic of modernity's burgeoning communication networks, its archival technologies, media of inscription, and new horizons of embodied information. To do so, his richly interdisciplinary study, informed by the history of American biology, draws liberally on the sociology of knowledge, Foucauldian genealogy, phenomenology (of Merleau-Ponty and the Bergsonism of Deleuze, chiefly), Luhmannian systems theory, poststructuralist media theory (Friedrich Kittler), cultural geography (Manuel Castells), and narrative theory (from Propp to Ricoeur). His historical protagonists are also far flung, including biologists (Spencer Baird, Hugo De Vries, Charles Davenport), fiction writers (London and Frank Norris, but also Edith Wharton), sociologists (Veblen, G. Stanley Hall), and turn-of-the-century industrialists (Leland Stanford). The presiding figure is David Starr Jordan, a well-known ichthyologist and eugenicist, founder of Stanford University, and indefatigable educator of American biology, whose work and thought Thurtle weaves throughout the book as “a type of structural refrain” (20). All in all, it's a heady, teeming brew, often intoxicating, only occasionally overspilling its conceptual cups or becoming a drain on the senses.

The book is organized into five main parts. The first, “Harnessing Heredity,” posits that thinking genetically requires, first, “the identification of a group of individuals within a distinct set of mores and practices that allows themselves to be defined as separate and provisionally distinct” (21). Here Thurtle posits a conceptual overlap between the American industrial nouveau riche's self-understanding of class as an indirect form of social inheritance—a competitive “aristocracy of merit” (39)—and the large-scale breeding experiments (of trotting horses, mostly) engaged in by its more prominent members. Theories of horse breeding were perhaps the “most widely disseminated theories on heredity in late nineteenth-century America” (34) and helped Progressive Era industrialists and reformers naturalize their social and economic power by conceiving of heredity as a “corporate inheritance” (37). With this model social privilege would be reproduced not through the purity of the vertical ancestral line but

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through “competition in institutional environments” (37) or horizontal managerial hierarchies that positioned individuals as impersonal components within an industrial system (68).

Section 2, “Fish-Market Phenomenology,” turns to naturalist Spencer F. Baird’s work with the Smithsonian Institution, the US Fish Commission, and the Pacific Railroad Survey to gauge the shifts in natural historical practice through late nineteenth-century transformations of “industrial infrastructures, perceptions, and information processing” (76). At stake here is the “relationship between the spatial practices of extractive mercantile enterprise and natural history” (128). For Thurtle, both practices are “built on material transfers over great distances,” and both share a common “habit of thought”—what Wolfgang Schivelbusch described as the “panoramic” mode of viewing the landscape (115). Baird’s detailed specimen collecting, as a “panoramic” mode of information processing, thus epitomized both a nineteenth-century encounter with the world as an increasingly complex, networked space of flows between different localities (in which specimens of natural history increasingly appeared as circulating commodities) and a nineteenth-century notion of human agency as a heroic, dynamic body moving through and ordering space as a concatenation of many local experiences.

Parts 3 and 4 may be of special interest to literary historians. Here Thurtle extends his insights about “the panoramic subject” of nineteenth-century information processing to the thick detail and developmental (or atavistic) narratives typical of naturalist fiction like Norris’s *The Octopus* or London’s *The Valley of the Moon*. In part 3, “History Writing Great Men Writing History,” Thurtle explains how the turn-of-the-century narratives operated by a logic of recapitulation (ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: the developmental story of the individual as microcosm of the species). Such fictions thought of character in the functionalist terms of productive force and action, and thereby shaped a teleological understanding of life, offering ideological support to a “Victorian conception of change ordered by the developmental sequence of a heroic agent” (202). In part 4, “The Poetics of Wandering,” Thurtle explores the extent to which the common figure of the wanderer in turn-of-the-century narratives at once abetted and challenged the panoramic subject and its teleological model for understanding evolutionary development. Wandering, especially in adolescence, was seen by many period thinkers as a healthy way of introducing novelty into individual, civic, and national development;

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vagrant motion only became a problem when it was seen as an end in itself, threatening to stall or suspend progress, production, or action in a welter of affect and sensation or the flux of time passing (231–41).

Thurtle's study is consistently thought provoking and erudite, but it also does some wandering of its own (the late theorization of "memory 1" and "memory 2" as mnemonic modes accompanying the emergence of genetic thought is a bit fuzzy for this reader). Thurtle also misses some opportunities—especially in these two sections—to make his dazzling interdisciplinarity really pay off for literary historians of the period traversed in his book. He might have done more to reckon with the current critical conversation about literary naturalism or the impact of evolutionary theory on nineteenth-century narrative. The claim that "during this period there was an overarching [teleological, functionalist, heroic] logic that structured how living entities progressed through time" (157) will not strike many readers of this journal as particularly controversial or novel. It is a familiar picture of nineteenth-century, post-Darwinian understandings of historical agency, which has been challenged and revised over the last decade. Thurtle cites Gillian Beer's landmark *Darwin's Plots* liberally, but Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines*, one of the more influential accounts of the naturalist deindividuation of the human organism in the industrial network, earns only a passing mention in a footnote. Some of the excellent recent work on turn-of-the-century American narrative and science—work by Jennifer Fleissner, Daylanne English, Dana Seitler, and Jane Thrallkill—is absent, even though these scholars address issues (the gendered stalling of naturalist temporality, the long shadow cast by eugenic thought on fiction of the period, the recursive temporal subjectivity of atavism, and the relationship between realism, affect, and embodiment, respectively) that bear directly on some of Thurtle's claims.

The book's final part, "Hybrid Time, Hybrid Space," uses plant hybridizer Luther Burbank as an exemplary transitional figure, a hinge between new and old paradigms of genetic thought. On the one hand, Burbank had mastered classical genetics as "a modernist science of mass culture," making deft use of industrial networks and large-scale production to create and sell genetic novelties like the Shasta Daisy (299). On the other hand, Burbank's idiosyncratic, nonstandardized records, which only he could make sense of, operated "by the hermeneutic codes of the panoramic mode" (303). His records, interpretable only by "a dynamic subject that linked together vastly new experiences in space and time,"

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show that Burbank had not yet thought of genetic change in a fully modern sense, “as a product of time irreducible to spatial experience” (305).

Some readers will also wonder: what is the conceptual labor of American modernist fiction in Thurtle’s fascinating account? That genetics is a modernist science, unthinkable without mass culture’s transformations of the space-time of information, is one of his most vital and persuasive arguments. But where is the modernist experimentation of, say, Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* or *The Making of Americans* in the history of new, modern ways of conceptualizing human life and inheritance patterns? The question is especially pressing because the model of nonteleological narrative wandering that Thurtle seems to value—narratives that foreground sensation and affect over utility, and that privilege “a specific way of folding time where the experience of time was not subordinated to the dictates of the moving body” (24)—is one of the hallmarks of aesthetic modernism, which, of course, was Bergsonist before Deleuze. In fact, one of Thurtle’s key conceptual maneuvers is to propose a “homology” between genetic and cinematic time, as theorized in Deleuze’s *Cinema* books (13). There Deleuze describes a shift from the “movement image,” in which space and time are organized according to the sensorimotor causality of the human body, to the “time image” of postwar cinema, in which movement—nonteleological, wandering, dispersed—becomes dependent on time. Scientific thinking about heredity, Thurtle proposes, witnessed a similar shift, moving from the frame of the willful individual (as in the panoramic subject) organizing the new informatics of mass society to a sense of the organism’s information-processing capacities as transcended or forever displaced by a vast technological system in which time is irreducible to space. Scholars of modernism like Tim Armstrong, Sara Danius, David Trotter, Juan Suárez, and Julian Murphet have recently been quite attentive to the avant-garde’s revolutionary encounters with the urgent inhumanity of the twentieth century’s new media. In and through it, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin on that great cyborg Charlie Chaplin, modern humanity would find its organs. If, as Thurtle argues so well and so innovatively in this fine book, genetic rationality is really the story of information-processing capacities, then surely the rich terrain of modernist intermedial experimentation also plays a part in the old new century’s more inventive conceptions of life.

Altruism, Gossip, and the Vicarious Apprehension of Human Living

Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction

William Flesch

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. 252 pages

William Benzon

One inevitably approaches a new book with one's mind stocked with various conceptions and biases. Of my many preconceptions, the one most relevant to the task of reviewing *Comeuppance* is bemused skepticism about evolutionary psychology. Flesch has done nothing to leaven that skepticism, but he has produced a discussion of fiction that is a surprising and original alternative to the literary Darwinism associated with Joseph Carroll and his school. In so doing he has spoken to another of my pre-existing notions, that critics ought not analyze the minds of literary characters as though they were the minds of real people.

As his starting point, Flesch considers the extensive work that evolutionary biologists and psychologists have done on cooperation, in particular on behavior where the direct benefits of one individual's behavior accrue to some other individual or individuals. For example, imagine that Jack is a bird who sometimes stands guard while the rest of the flock is feeding. When Jack spots a predator, he sounds the alarm, thus allowing the other birds to flee—a benefit to them. But that same warning cry will also attract the predator's attention to Jack himself—a risk to Jack. Sooner or later Jack and others like him will probably be killed in the course of serving the group. Once dead, Jack and the others no longer have a chance to pass their guard-the-flock trait to the next generation. What happens if flock-guarding behavior disappears because all the guards have been killed without leaving flock-guarding descendants? Will the entire flock die through predation?

A solution to this problem depends on the fact that traits are passed on through genes, and it makes no difference whether or not Jack transmits flock-guarding genes to the next generation as long as some

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individuals do, some that have benefited from Jack's actions. And so it goes with other forms of cooperative behavior as well. These cooperative behaviors can benefit the group—and thus Jack—in different ways, thus helping to pay for Jack's guardianship. As long as each individual balances benefits received with contributions given, the group can survive and even thrive.

But how do we guarantee that individuals will make contributions in proportion to their benefits? How do we guarantee that individuals won't cheat, that they won't free-ride on the activities of others? We keep score. That is, group members monitor one another's contributions and benefits. When an individual's benefits conspicuously exceed his or her contributions, that individual will be punished and thereby encouraged to balance his or her account. Note that the act of meting out punishment often costs more in time, energy, and possibly injury than the punisher receives in direct benefit. In the extreme, a would-be punisher could be killed, a very high cost indeed.

Flesch devotes the first half of his book to reviewing the relevant literature on this and related matters. His central point is that when we experience fiction, we monitor the lives of fictional characters using the same biobehavioral equipment we use in monitoring our real fellows as we keep score of their credits and debits in the group account. The need to monitor our fellows gives us a vicarious interest in their actions, and that vicarious interest is emotionally charged.

Flesch develops this notion of vicarious experience through reference to David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* in particular, and Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The anger we feel on witnessing transgression comes not through some identification with the victim or victims of the transgression but belongs to the affective component of our social monitoring system. This anger is, in effect, a sentiment on behalf of the group, not on behalf of any particular individuals. The pleasure we feel in just punishment or just reward, Flesch argues, is similarly vicarious and on behalf of the group, not some particular individual or individuals.

How do we monitor our fellows? There is direct observation, a behavioral mode we share with other animals. But we can also exchange tales about them, we can gossip. Flesch thus argues that fiction is, in effect, gossip about imaginary people.

To my mind, the most important consequence of this position has to

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do with our emotional engagement in the lives of literary characters. As Flesch remarks in a footnote criticizing “orthodox” literary Darwinists:

they treat literary characters as motivated by the same things that motivate real humans, rather than as representations to whom real humans react. It’s our reactions that psychology can analyze, not the actions of literary characters. (231)

Flesch thus does away with the nasty problems inherent in the vague notion of identification that he regards as being grounded in a mistaken conception of imitation. Given that vicarious interest “is an irreducible and primary attitude that we take toward others” (15), Flesch goes on to argue that identification, such as it is, must in fact depend on our vicarious experience of a character.

I would add further that this formulation gives us a way of dealing with our experience of passages involving multiple actors. My favorite example is the opening scene of act 4 of *Much Ado About Nothing*: all the major characters are gathered on stage for a wedding, and a half dozen of them play significant roles in the scene. It’s not clear to me that we identify with any of these characters, much less all of them. Claudio drives the scene, at least in the beginning, but he’s acting foolishly and we know it. No identification there. We feel anger and perhaps pity, but how can we identify with him? Hero is the innocent victim of his verbal assault, and we may sympathize with her plight, but we can’t share her sense of bewilderment. She may not know why Claudio is doing this, but we do—and we don’t like it. And so it goes with the other characters. We’re interested in their words, feelings, and actions—we’re concerned for their welfare, imaginary beings though they are—but we do not identify with them. Our experience of them is irreducibly vicarious.

In the course of his argument Flesch deploys a satisfying range of examples from Dickens, Trollope, Nabokov, Shakespeare, Leiris, James, Hitchcock, Faulkner, Homer, and others, culminating in a final chapter, “Vindication and Vindictiveness,” that concentrates on scenes from *Oliver Twist* and *King Lear*. Let us consider a passage from that last chapter as an illustration of the biological texture of his argument:

Vindication or the fantasy of vindication therefore is a mode of altruistic punishment, since it offers pleasure in confuting and correcting those who have done harm through their misjudg-

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ments. The most harmful sort of misjudgment of this sort is *vindictiveness*, where being vindictive means something like altruistic punishment misfiring. Vindictiveness and spite are near synonyms, and it is worth remembering that spite is another name for altruistic punishment. To be spiteful is to be willing to pay a net cost to harm others. But it's a word we tend to use when we think the altruism it indicates has no prosocial benefits—when it doesn't contribute to our sense of justice or fairness. (157)

The language of costs and benefits is, of course, the language of economics, but it is also the language of evolutionary biology, which is all about costs and benefits and how they accrue to individuals and to groups. Misjudgment and, by implication, judgment, are about monitoring the behavior of others. And then there is “altruistic punishment,” which is a special creature of biological reasoning about cooperation. To a behavioral biologist or evolutionary psychologist, *altruism* is a term of art indicating behavior that benefits others at some cost to the behaving individual. To characterize punishment as altruistic is to assert that the punishment serves the group and not merely the individual meting out that punishment, a concept we've seen above.

Now, the notions of spite and vindictiveness, of course, exist independently of Flesch's biological explication in terms of altruistic punishment. I find that explication interesting, but that's not the point. Is that explication useful and illuminating, does it do more than ground those notions in biology? I'm not sure that it does. As another example, consider an off-hand observation later in the chapter: “As we've seen, anger is the emotional reflex that evolution provides to commit us to actions that go counter to our own individual and immediate interests” (175). I'm not sure whether or not I believe this, but I find the formulation striking. Still, I'm not sure that I've been able to work my way from being struck to having a deeper understanding of anger and its deployment in literary texts.

I feel that something's amiss, but I don't have any accurate sense of what it is. I suspect it involves, at least in part, the distinction that behavioral biologists make between ultimate and proximate causes of behavior. The proximate cause is the behavioral mechanism actually responsible for the behavior, the neural and bodily structures and processes that execute the behavior. Anger, pleasure, monitoring, and judgment—these exist in

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the proximate domain. The notion of altruistic punishment, in contrast, is defined with respect to the ultimate domain, which is about evolutionary purpose, adaptive value. This is the domain in which a population (genotypes and phenotypes) engages in long-term interaction with the environment (survival or extinction).

The evolutionary logic of cooperative behavior is the logic of this ultimate domain—the logic of genes, phenotypes, reproduction, fitness, and the environment. What follows from this logic are the mechanisms that actually produce the proximate behavior. The stories Flesch examines engage readers directly through those proximate mechanisms, not through the evolutionary mechanisms, but the explanatory force of Flesch's argument is lodged in those more distant evolutionary mechanisms, not the proximate mechanisms, which he takes for granted (as do the literary Darwinists). Thus it's not clear to me how far his literary analysis goes beyond the complex redescription of actions in biological terms. Is he using biology to tell us new things about literature, or is he using literature to provide rich examples of biological subtlety?

I'm inclined to think that the answer to these questions depends on a deeper explanation of vicarious experience, one that confronts the problem of proximate mechanisms head-on and considers how they might work. Perhaps Flesch will examine those mechanisms in another book. Until then, we must rest content with the notion of vicarious experience, which I regard as an original and important contribution.

Revisiting Evolution in 1890s Fiction

The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank

by John Glendening

Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007. 225 pages

Vanessa L. Ryan

John Glendening frames *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels* with a prologue that recounts the first time the twenty-three-year-old Charles Darwin saw the island of Tierra del Fuego off South America and an epilogue that captures Darwin's first impressions of the Galápagos Islands. These encounters during Darwin's trip on the *Beagle* in the 1830s have come to be regarded as central moments in the retelling of the origins of Darwin's theory of evolution: the insights made on this five-year voyage set in motion the thinking that led to one of the most controversial books of the Victorian period, *The Origin of Species*. Looking at Darwin's correspondence and his account in *The Journal of Researches* (1839, often referred to as *Voyage of the Beagle*), Glendening shows that far from celebrating and wondering at the natural world, Darwin's first reaction to Tierra del Fuego is one of confusion, fear, and anxiety. The vegetation is snarled, dense, and impenetrable; the native Fuegians appear as a blend of strange characteristics, astonishing, wild, and savage. In his description of both the vegetation and the people Darwin uses the word *entangled*, a word he later uses in the concluding paragraph of *Origin*, when he speaks of the "entangled bank." Glendening contrasts Darwin's positive approach in this much-studied paragraph, in which natural order and harmony underlie the apparent chaos of the entangled bank, with the dark side of entanglement suggested by his initial encounter with Tierra del Fuego. Tracing the importance of evolutionary theory, especially the metaphor of entanglement, in the novels of H. G. Wells, Thomas Hardy, Bram Stoker, and Joseph Conrad, Glendening argues that they are marked by similar confusion and anxiety: these novels explore the negative "implications of natural selection that the entangled bank disguises" (41).

Darwin later plays down his anxiety in Tierra del Fuego in much the same way that Glendening argues the final paragraph of *Origin* plays

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down the negative implications of the theory of natural selection. The “entangled bank” of *Origin*, he argues, is a metaphor for the interdependence of species, a form of “dynamic interaction” (13). To this unusually positive reading of the final paragraph—after all, just a few sentences after the “entangled bank” metaphor, Darwin cites the “war of nature,” “famine” and “death”—Glendening opposes the troubling use of the metaphor of entanglement, and of evolutionary theory in general, in the novels of the late nineteenth century. These novels, he argues, reveal “uncertainty and confused interrelationships that, fostered by nineteenth-century evolutionism, subvert ideas of order—tangling the web of Darwinian theory” (15). They explore the kind of “cognitive entanglement” concealed by the “celebratory” passages of *Origin* but suggested by Darwin’s own anxious reaction to Tierra del Fuego, an experience that disorders his dualistic conceptual framework. Glendening’s argument works by means of a set of binaries—human/animal, modern/primitive, masculinity/femininity, progress/degeneration, and nature/culture—that through evolutionary theory become increasingly entangled or incoherently mixed in the novels. He leads us through a series of sensitive close readings, focusing on *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, *Dracula*, and *Heart of Darkness*. These novels reveal the complexities and confusions produced by Darwinism: they “confuse the standards and definitions that configure modern society and self-identity, and they do so by placing characters and societies under stress within evolutionary contexts” (17). By revealing these dualities “as mostly conventional and as inadequate for confronting the chaos of the post-Darwinian world,” Glendening argues that “entanglement calls attention to the associated problems of relativism, randomness, indeterminacy, and unpredictability.”

As Glendening acknowledges, these are novels that have received repeated critical attention for their response to evolutionary theories. Yet by focusing on a set of novels published in a single decade—all in the 1890s—he offers a historically more focused study of the literary implications of the development hypothesis. Darwin and evolutionary theory have been central to Victorian novel studies ever since Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots* and George Levine’s *Darwin and the Novelists*, and there is little sign that the interest in Darwin is waning, given the recent anniversary celebrations of the publication of *Origin*. In recent years, however, the familiar concept of the mid-Victorian Darwinian revolution has been increasingly called into question. James Secord, for example, insists that

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a “Darwin-centered account” of the emergence of evolution is simply “no longer credible” (4). Peter J. Bowler, examining the late nineteenth century, contends that despite widespread acceptance of evolution, there was general rejection of natural selection, so that what the final decades of the nineteenth century in fact witnessed is better characterized as a “non-Darwinian revolution.” Yet the 1890s was the period that witnessed the most intense debates. Glendening makes use of this more recent scholarship in the history of evolutionary theory by such writers as Bowler, Robert Richards, and Frank Sulloway. Yet the nature of the project—particularly its focus on tracing the metaphor of entanglement—means that to a large extent he reproduces the Darwin-centrism that this scholarship calls into question. While there is much scholarship on the importance of Darwinian theories and debates on nineteenth-century novels, few of those studies trace in detail the competing evolutionary theories and the changing nature of the debates over the last decades of the nineteenth century. Glendening might have made more of this part of his argument.

Some of the most valuable moments in the book occur when Glendening traces the tensions between competing late-Victorian evolutionary theories in the novels. These include the writings of Charles Lyell, Robert Chambers, T. H. Huxley, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. His study of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, for example, examines Wells’s reception of Darwinism, neo-Lamarckism, and August Weismann’s germ-plasm theory. His close attention to the importance of non-Darwinian theories almost makes one feel that his explicit focus on Darwin limits some of the conclusions he draws. His study suggests that rather than exploring the implications of evolutionary theory understood as natural selection, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is most interesting for its focus on “plasticity,” the implications of comparative physiology, and for its exploration of ideas of adaptation and inheritance. He returns repeatedly to the novel’s engagement with Lamarck’s theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics. The arguments over neo-Lamarckism in the late nineteenth century are perhaps even more complex than Glendening allows: while the idea of inheriting adaptive characteristics could be seen as offering promise of progress over generations, it also underpins a fear of the acquisition of negative characteristics (criminality, insanity, moral decline) that was particularly pronounced in the late nineteenth century. Yet the attention Glendening gives to these non-Darwinian theories offers a potential counterbalance to the persistent interest in Darwin. Glendening offers,

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for example, a rich analysis of Lamarckism in the less well-known novel *Green Mansions* by W. H. Hudson.

In the main, however, he focuses on canonical novels, offering analyses of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Dracula*, and *Heart of Darkness*. In the first two of these readings he moves away from his guiding interest in Darwin. He argues that *Tess* can be seen as good or bad in evolutionary terms, but essentially as maladapted (69). Looking in detail at the scene where *Tess* and other dairymaids on their way to church are forced to halt because of a large pool of water in the road, he shows that *Tess* can never leave the entangled bank, which reflects "evolutionary complexity" and the "chaos of the human condition" (102). In his analysis of *Dracula*, the only novel he studies that does not use the imagery of the entangled bank, Glendenning examines the familiar themes of the perceived threats of primitivism and degeneration. Examining the tension between devolution and progress, he reads Harker's journey as an encounter between "evolutionary good and devolutionary evil" (114). After highlighting the negative implications of the previous novels, he gives a surprisingly positive reading of *Dracula's* conclusion, not addressing the fact that Harker's son bears the blood of the vampire. In his analysis of *Heart of Darkness* he examines Conrad's engagement with T. H. Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics," a text that advocates a countervailing moral force of public opinion in society. He argues that Conrad rejects such a moral force, and that the novella takes on an "overwhelmingly sinister Darwinian character" (156). In a final section he turns to A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, a "neo-Victorian" (185) variant of Darwinian fiction, which he uses to show how late nineteenth-century novels in their skepticism, anxiety, and awareness of contingency share an almost postmodern attitude.

Glendenning positions his study at the intersection between the older scholarship of Gillian Beer and George Levine and the more recent "literary Darwinism" of Joseph Carroll. Levine had already used the extended metaphor of entanglement, writing of Dickens as "the great novelist of entanglement, finding in the mysteries of the urban landscape those very connections of interdependence and genealogy that characterize Darwin's tangled bank" (119). Glendenning is working in the same tradition, bringing Darwin's metaphor into conjunction with urban settings (for example, he identifies the "entangled bank" in *Origin* as the bank of a railway cutting). This established tradition of work in science and literature has more

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recently been challenged for presupposing the priority of science, looking first and foremost at the way literary writers respond to scientific ideas. Glendening's desire to move beyond an analysis of literature as reactive to science is what perhaps leads him in his introduction to a series of analogies with other modern scientific theories, such as chaos theory, and to his interest in the literary Darwinist approach. Seeking to make connections with recent work in the field of evolutionary psychology, Joseph Carroll proposes that novels like *Pride and Prejudice* are the "literary equivalent of a fruit fly" (190), or as Jonathan Gottschall puts it still more bluntly: literature is "a vast, cheap, virtually inexhaustible argosy of information about human nature" (197). One can be grateful that Glendening's study does not make good on his promise to reflect connections between the novels at hand and evolutionary psychology, an approach that is inevitably ahistorical and ultimately implies, I believe, an impoverished view of literature. Instead, his insistence that the question of entanglement is also one of cognition might have led him to consider the engagement of evolutionary theory with late nineteenth-century mental science, one of the areas of Victorian science that has recently come under detailed scrutiny. Glendening is at his best working historically and through close textual analysis: the value of this study lies in its rich and sensitive close readings. While he acknowledges using the phrases *Darwinian* and *Darwinism* loosely, the nature of his analysis suggests that we might do better making finer distinctions between different theories of evolution. *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels* suggests the importance of considering the novels of the 1890s and the turn of the century together, which allows for an analysis of the complex debates between novelists and competing evolutionary theories in the late nineteenth century.

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Darwin at the Edge of the Visible

Darwin's Camera: Art and Photography in the Theory of Evolution

by Philip Prodger

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 320 pages

Daniel A. Novak

Philip Prodger's handsomely produced, eminently readable, and extremely knowledgeable study of Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* in relation to photography and scientific illustration makes some important arguments relevant for literary scholars interested in Victorian visual culture in general and Darwin in particular. Prodger's main focus is on the dialectical relation between Darwin's work and nineteenth-century photography—his important role in the history of photography and the importance of photography in his own career and theories. Beyond the fact that Darwin published *The Voyage of the Beagle* in 1839 (the year Daguerre announced his invention of photography), Prodger argues that "The maturation of Darwin's theories paralleled the development of increasingly sophisticated photographic technologies" (xxiii). More specifically, as one of the first scientific books published with photographic illustrations, *Expression* gave Darwin "a prominent voice in scientific photography, and his efforts in the field helped shape photo history" (xxiii). And while Prodger's focus on *Expression* might seem narrow, or the text less important than *The Origin of Species* or *The Descent of Man*, he shows how *Expression* represented an ambitious extension of evolutionary theory from visible, physical characteristics to internal, seemingly invisible emotions. Darwin's crucial and (perhaps still) controversial intervention was to argue that the emotions and expressions that seemed to make us most human are the ones that link us most clearly with our animal inheritance.

Prodger's meticulous study of the Darwin archive in Cambridge (including Darwin's notebooks, letters, and collection of photographs) enables him to depict the visual contexts, technologies, and conventions in which *Expression* was produced. Opening chapters specifically target the (mistaken) notion that Darwin was not interested in illustration or visuality. Far from it, he shows that Darwin was deeply engaged with larger

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theoretical questions of visualization as well as the minutiae of image production and aesthetics. Prodger offers charts of numbers of illustrations in his work, points to Darwin's early and wide-ranging interest in painting and the fine arts, his son's dabbling in photography, his family's role in the invention of photography (his uncle Thomas Wedgwood was an early experimenter), and even notes that a chronically ill Darwin would roam London streets to collect photographs for his *Expression* book. He highlights Darwin's role in emergent technologies of photographic book printing (he used the newly developed heliotype, which preceded the photogravure technique). And he goes into great detail about Darwin's correspondence with a variety of artists who guided him on his quest for images depicting emotions and with the nonphotographic illustrators of the book. Some of the most interesting plates in *Darwin's Camera* reproduce images with Darwin's careful notes and instructions written on them, indicating changes and disagreements.

Prodger only briefly contextualizes Darwin's approach to illustration with that of earlier scientific explorations of the "passions" and with phrenological and physiognomic treatises, but other scholars, most recently Jonathan Smith (in his excellent *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture*) have more thoroughly covered this ground. More interesting is his effort to differentiate Darwin's work from anthropological and ethnographic photographs aligned with a colonial project of marking cultural and racial differences as differences in levels of evolutionary development. Even Darwin's close friends and relatives were involved in these projects (both Thomas Huxley and Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, to different degrees), but Darwin's *Expression of Emotions* argued for the universality of human expression: "Darwin was committed to the idea that all humans, regardless of ethnic origin, express emotion in the same way" (214). Along the same lines, Darwin collected but ultimately rejected images of the insane that represented "a typological approach to personality that Darwin strived to avoid" (97).

But for readers in literary studies, especially those familiar with recent books on photography, Victorian culture, and literary realism, as well as readers interested in photographic theory, Prodger offers a more important (if understated) argument. The opening sentence of his introduction begins by correcting the tendency to read photography "as being born whole, with all the ease and authority it currently commands." Instead, building on Jennifer Tucker's work on scientific photography (*Nature*

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Exposed), Prodger notes that in 1839 the idea of “objective” photography was “decades away,” and that today’s notions of photographic accuracy and speed evolved over the entire nineteenth century. This is, of course, simultaneously a discursive and theoretical question as well as a technological and aesthetic one. Prodger’s interest here is in how nineteenth-century scientists and photographers understood and spoke about photographic truth as well as the technological challenges related to exposure time and focal lengths that made purely objective images and instantaneous photography almost impossible—challenges that lasted almost through the end of Darwin’s life in 1882.

Because of this, Darwin’s effort to record the fleeting traces of internal emotion on the body demanded something more than the click of a button. Apart from selectively cropping commercially produced photographs that he collected to highlight some features and hide others, Darwin employed the photographer most famous (even infamous) for photographic manipulation, the art photographer Oscar Gustav Rejlander, who took the majority of the photographs in *Expression* and even posed in simulated depictions of emotion for the book. One of the most famous images in *Expression*, that of a crying baby, was actually a chalk drawing Rejlander made to look like a photograph. Rather than disqualifying these images for use in a scientific text, Prodger reads Darwin’s use of staged and manipulated images for scientific illustration in the context of mid-to-late-Victorian expectations for photographic objectivity—expectations that differ greatly from twentieth-century (and contemporary critical) understandings of the medium. Driving both Darwin’s and nineteenth-century photographers’ approach to photographic images was their sense of the disjunction between what cameras record and what we see. Altering imperfect images to get closer to what we see (and what we see as real) was understood as both aesthetically and scientifically appropriate and even necessary. For Prodger, critics such as Jennifer Green-Lewis and Carol Armstrong (and others whose approaches he strangely describes as “deconstructionist”), read Victorian photography “retroactively” (221) through later notions of photography and scientific objectivity. Ironically, Darwin’s text is very much part of the history of this transformation in how photography would be read and used in the future, but for Prodger it is a product of a very different moment.

Along these lines, the second half of the book largely focuses on Rejlander’s photographic theory and practice and on his correspondence

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and collaboration with Darwin. Prodger even includes unpublished manuscript notes by Rejlander on expression from the Darwin Archive in an appendix. In choosing Rejlander as his photographic partner and de facto collaborator, Darwin not only chose a photographer famous for manipulated images based on pictorial genre scenes and classical paintings (his most famous image, the *Two Ways of Life*, was based on Raphael's *The School of Athens* and was made up of over thirty negatives), but also a man who theorized photography in terms of imagination, fiction, and language. As Rejlander puts it: "In all picture compositions the thought should take the first place . . . and all else be regarded as the language which is to give it expression" (171). What to contemporary readers might seem to be the least flexible of mediums, Rejlander saw as a "plastic" form (164) capable of representing the allegorical and abstract, invisible and ephemeral. Thus, in the quote above, the "all else" subordinate to "thought" is in fact the body, subject, and moment being photographed; they become a kind of linguistic raw material for writing photographic meaning. For Rejlander and fellow art photographer Henry Peach Robinson, photographic manipulation made photographs more, not less, real. Given that Darwin required images that would be both "realistic" and typical or "metaphorical" (23), Rejlander was not a "peculiar" (xxiv) choice but a perfect one. Taking Rejlander's writing seriously as a theory relevant for Darwin's own understanding of photography and photographic illustration, and historicizing standards of pictorial realism, are important not only for historical and art-historical perspectives but also for the (now decades-old) visual turn in literary studies. That Prodger doesn't stress this nearly as explicitly as he might (this work is mainly done in the introduction and conclusion) doesn't diminish the importance of this argument for how we understand Victorian photography and how we study it.

Prodger closes with a brief reading of the legacy of *Expression*—a book that had only mixed commercial success and whose "universal" images soon looked far too specifically Victorian and "outmoded" (206). But its influence on scientific illustration and photography in general was much wider. For Prodger, *Expression* was "the high-water mark in Darwin's evolutionary theories" and "contained the most sophisticated program of illustration in any of his books" (218). At its heart, this book is an elaborate and wide-ranging history of *Expression*, providing an important biographical, art-historical, and technological context. And while

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Prodger asserts the importance of Darwin's use of photography for his work and for the history of illustration, it is not a book focused on the relationship between photography and evolutionary theory. For the most part, Prodger keeps his analytical voice in the background and lets much of the rich material speak for itself. Literary and cultural scholars will find in *Darwin's Camera* a rich sourcebook for those interested in further studying and theorizing issues such as likeness and inheritance, evolution and representation, and mechanical and biological reproduction. Those especially interested in the history of Darwin's use of an imperfect and conflicted medium to capture emotional traces "at the edge of visibility" (222) will find much to admire.

